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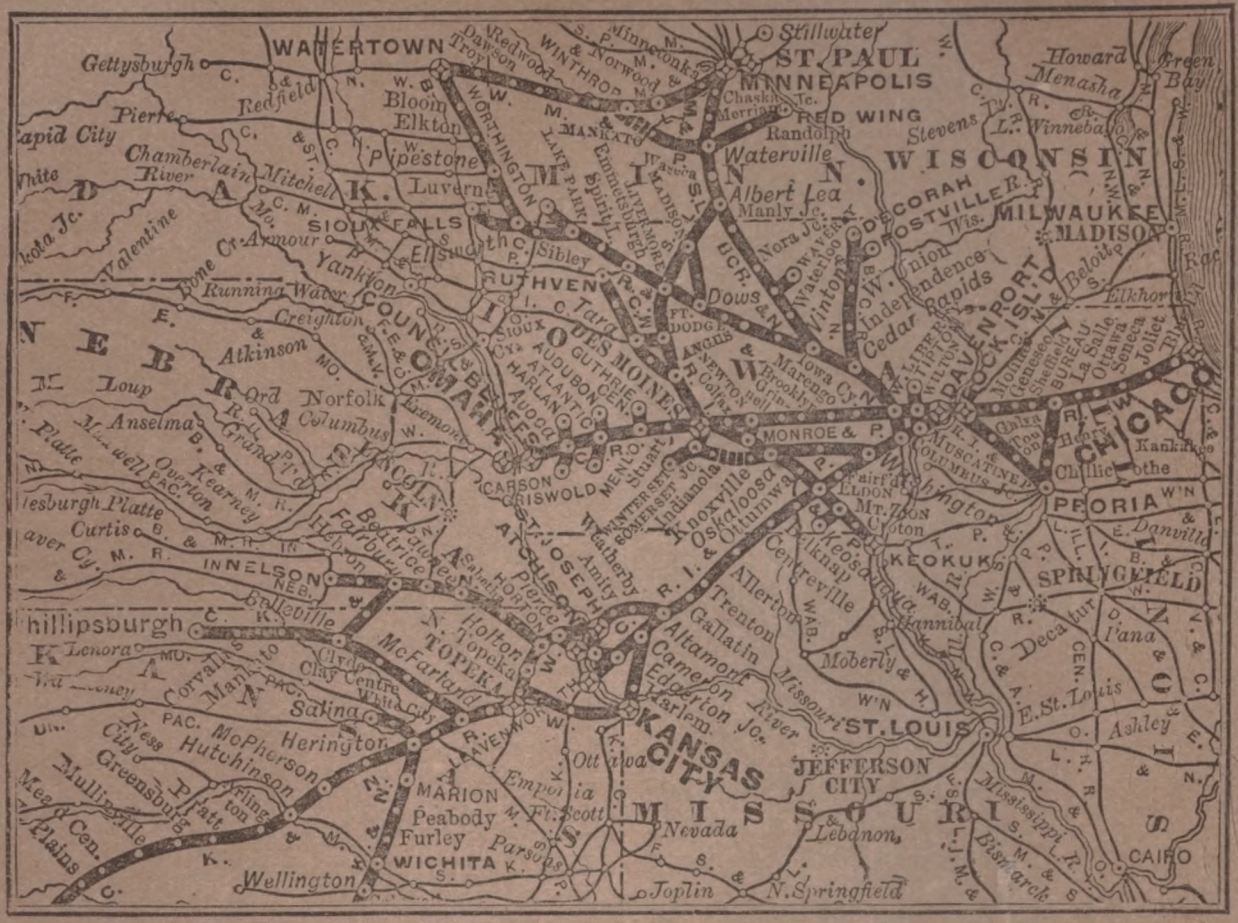

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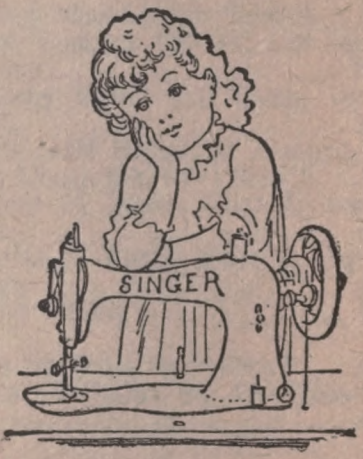

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THE TREASURE OF PEARLS

CHAPTER I.

THE PIECES AND THE BOARD.

We stand on Mexican soil. We are on the seaward skirt of its westernmost State of Sonora, in the wild lands almost washed by the Californian Gulf, which will be the formidable last ditch of the unconquerable red men flying before the Star of the Empire.

Before us, the immensity of land; behind us, that of the Pacific Ocean.

O immeasurable stretches of verdure which form the ever unknown territory, the poetically entitled Far West, grand and attractive, sweet and terrible, the natural trellis of so rich, beautiful, mighty, and unkempt flora, that India has none of more vigour of production!

To an æronaut's glance, these green and yellow plains would offer only a vast carpet embroidered with dazzling flowers and foliage, almost as gay and multicoloured, irregularly blocked out like the pieces of glass in ancient church windows with the lead, by rivers torrentuous in the wet season, rugged hollows of glistening quick-sands and neck-deep mud in summer, all of which blend with an unexampledly brilliant azure on the clear horizon.

It is only gradually, after the view has become inured to the fascinating landscape, that it can make out the details: hills not to be scorned for altitude, steep banks of rivers, and a thousand other unforeseen impediments for the wretch fleeing from hostile animals or fellow-beings, which agreeably spoil the somewhat saddening sameness, and are hidden completely from the general glance by the rank grass, rich canes, and gigantic flower-stalks.

Oh, for the time—the reader would find the patience—to enumerate the charming products of this primitive nature, which shoots up and athwart, hangs, swings, juts out, crosses, interlaces, binds, twines, catches, encircles, and strays at random to the end of the naturalist's investigation, describing majestic paraboles, forming grandiose arcades, and finally completes the most splendid, aye, and sublime spectacle that is given to any man on the footstool to admire for superabundant contrasts, and enthralling harmonies.

The man in the balloon whom we imagine to be hovering over this mighty picture, even higher up than the eagle of the Sierra Madre itself, who sails in long circles above the bald-headed vulture about to descend on a prey, which the king of the air disdains—this lofty viewer, we say, would spy, on the afternoon when we guide the reader to these wilds apparently unpeopled, more than one human creature wriggling like worms in the labyrinth.

At one point some twenty men, white and yet swarthy, unlike in dress but similarly armed to the teeth, were separately "worming" their tortuous way, we repeat, through the *chapparal* proper, or plantations of the low-branching live oak, as well as the gigantic ferns, mezquito, cactus, nopal, and fruit-laden shrubs, the oblong-leaved mahogany, the bread tree, the fan-leaved abanijo, the pirijao languidly swinging its enormous golden fruit in clusters, the royal palm, devoid of foliage along the stem, but softly nodding its high, majestically-plumed head; the guava, the banana, the intoxicating chirimoya, the cork-oak, the Peruvian tree, the war-palm letting its resinous gum slowly ooze forth to capture the silly moths, and even young snakes and lizards which squirmed on the hardening gum like a platter of Palissy ware abruptly galvanised into life.

These adventurers insinuated themselves through this tangle unseen and, perhaps, unsuspected by one another, all tending to the same point, probably the same rendezvous. A marked devil-may-care spirit, which tempered the caution of men brought up in the desert, betokened that they were master of the woods hereabouts, or, at least, only recognised the Indian rovers as their contesting fellow-tenants.

Elsewhere, a blundering stranger, of a fairness which startled the prong-horn antelopes as much as a superstitious man would be at seeing a sheeted form at midnight, tramped desperately as one who felt lost, but nervously feared to delay whilst there was daylight, over the immense spreads of dahlias, flaunting flowers each full of as much honey as Hercules would care to drain at a draught, whiter than Chimborazo's snow, or ruddier than the tiger-lily's blood-splashes; through thick creepers which withered with the pressing circulation of boiling sap like vegetable serpents around the trees, from which gorged reptiles, not unlike these growing cords themselves, dangled, and now and then half curled up, startling with his inexpert foot (in a boot cut and torn by the bramble and splinters of the ironwood and lignum vitæ shattered in the *tornado*—a "twister," indeed)—animals of all sizes and species, which leaped, flew, floundered, and crept aloof in the chaos not unpierceable to them: forms on two, four, countless feet, with long, broad, ample, or tiny wings, singing, calling, yelling, howling up and down a scale of incredible extent, now softly seducing the astray to follow, now taunting him and screaming for him to forbear. If he were not maddened, he must have had a heart of steel.

Elsewhere still, a man was riding on a horse whose harness and trappings smelt so strongly of the stable, that is, of human slavery, that it alarmed the stupid, mournful-eyed bisons, the alligator as he basked in the caking mire, the hideous iguana slothfully ascending a wind-cast trunk, that maneless lion the cougar, the panthers and jaguars too lazy or too glutted with the night's raid to follow the prey, the honey bear warily sniffing the flower which harboured a bee, the sullen grizzly who looked out of a hilly den amazed at so impudent an invader. Upon this horse, whose Spanish descent and state of born thraldom was resented by the angry neigh of his never-lassoed brethren, proudly careering in unnumbered *manadas* upon endless courses, this man was resolutely progressing, ruthlessly severing vines and floral clumps with a

splendid old broadsword, cool as only a Mexican can remain in a felt sombrero and a voluminous blanket cloak; charging and crushing, unless they quickened their retreat, the venomous cotejo, the green lizard, the basilisk and tiny, yet awful, coral snakes, and never swerving, though the tongue could almost attain what was unmuffled of his face, the monstrous anaconda and its long, spotted kinsfolk. This mounted Mexican took a line, not so straight as the footmen were pursuing, which would bring him to the spot whither they were converging.

Imagining that the one of the wayfarers who evinced an ignorance of prairie life which made his existence each moment a greater miracle, and that the horseman who, on the contrary, rode on as sturdily as a post-boy in a well-worn road, formed two sides of a triangle of which the evident destination of the rider and the other Mexicans was the final end, in about the centre of this fancied space, other human objects of interest were visible to our aërial observer.

Toilsomely marching, one or the other of two men supporting alternately the young girl who, singularly enough, was their companion in this wilderness, the new trio formed a group which fluttered the almost never-so-startled feathered inhabitants of that grove; curassoes, tanagers, noisy loros, humming birds as small as flies, hunting flies as large as themselves, toucans that seemed overburdened with their ultra-liberal beaks, wood pigeons, fiery flamingoes, in striking contrast with the black swans that clattered in the cane brake.

Behind them, in calm, contented chase, easy and active as the pretty gray squirrels, which alone took the alarm and sprang away when he noiselessly appeared, a shining copper-skinned Indian, with robust limbs and graceful gait, an eye to charm and to command, moved like a king who scorned to set his guards to punish the intruder, on his domains, but stalked savagely onward to chastise them himself. The plentiful scalp-locks that fringed his leggings showed that he had left many a skeleton of the paleface to bleach in the torrid sun, and that the sex, the youth and the beauty of the gentle companion of the two whites on whose track he so placidly proceeded, would not spare her a single pang, far less obtain her immunity. On his Apollo-like bosom was tattooed, in sepia and vermilion, a rattlesnake, the emblem not merely of a tribe, but the sect of a tribe, the ring within the circle; he belonged to the select band of the Southern Apaches, the Poison-Hatchets, initiated in the compounding of deadly salves and potent potions, to cure the victim of which the united faculties of Europe would be baffled. No doubt those arrows, of which the feathers bristled in a full quiver, and his other weapons, were anointed with that venom which makes such Indians shunned by all the prairie rovers.

Such was the panorama, sublime, enthralling and fearsome, and the puppets which are presented to our imaginary gazer.

Leaving him to dissolve into the air whence we evolved him, we descend to terra firma near the last party to which we directed attention.

The sun was at its zenith, which fact rendered the animation of so many persons the more remarkable, since few are a-foot in the heat of the day in those regions.

Suddenly, with a slight hiss as of a living snake, an arrow sped unerringly through a tuft of liquid embers, and laid low, after one brief spasm of death, a huge dog which seemed a mongrel of Newfoundlander and a wild wolf.

Shortly afterwards the branches which masked the poor animal's stiffening body (on which the greedy flies began already to settle, and towards which the tumble-bugs were scrambling in their amazing instinct), were parted by a

trembling hand, and a white man of Spanish-American extraction, showed his face streaming with perspiration and impressed with terror and despair, to which, at the discovery, was immediately added a profound sorrow.

"Snake-bit! that is what detained Fracasador (the Breaker into Bits). Come, arouse thee, good dog!" he said in Spanish, but instantly perceiving the tip of the arrow shaft buried almost wholly in the broad chest, he uttered a sigh of deep consternation, and added—

"Again the dart of death! we are still pursued by that remorseless fiend."

Fracasador was certainly dead.

"After our horses, the dog! after the dog, ourselves! Brave Benito! poor Dolores, my poor child!"

He started, as the bushes rustled, but it was not an enemy who appeared. It was the young woman whom he had named, and a youth in his two-and-twentieth year at the farthest.

Benito was tall, well and stoutly built; his form even stylish, his features fine and regular; his complexion seemed rather pale for a native, from his silky hair, which came down disorderly on his square shoulders, being of a jet black. Intelligence and unconquerable daring shone in his large black eyes. On his visage sat a seldom-seen blending of courage, fidelity and frankness. In short, one of those men who win at first sight, and can be trusted to the last.

Though his costume, reduced by the dilapidation of the thorns, consisted of linen trousers caught in at the waist by a red China crape *faya* or sash, and a coarse "hickory" shirt, he resembled a disguised prince, so much ease and distinction abounded in his bearing. But, for that matter, throughout Spanish-America, it is impossible to distinguish a noble from a common man, for they all express themselves with the same elegance, employ language quite as nicely chosen, and have equally courteous manners.

The girl whom he supported, almost carried in fact, was sleeping without being fully unconscious, as happens to soldiers on a forced march. Dolores was not over sixteen. Her beauty was exceptional, and her modesty made her low melodious voice falter when she spoke. She was graceful and dainty as an Andalusian. The profile so strongly resembled that of the man who was leaning over the slain dog that it did not require the remembrance that he had spoken of her as his child, for one to believe that he had father and daughter under his ken.

"Don't wake her!" said the elder man, with a quick wave of the hand to quell the other's surprise. "Let her not see the poor faithful hound, Benito. And keep yourself, as I do, before her as a shield. The cowardly foe to whom we owe the loss of our horses, our arms, and now our loyal comrade is lurking in the thicket, may even—Oh, Holy Mother, that should protect us from the heathen!—be this instant taking aim at our poor, dear Dolores, with another missile from his accursed quiver."

"The villain!" cried Benito, darting a furious glance around. "Luckily, she sleeps, Don José."

Indeed the elder Mexican could take the girl without awakening her out of the other's arms, and, after a long kiss on her pure forehead, bear her away from the dog's proximity into a covert where he laid her upon the grass with precaution.

"Thank heaven for this sleep," said he, "it will make her temporarily oblivious of her hunger."

Benito had taken the other's zarape which he spread over the girl. That blanket was their only appendage; beside the scanty covering which the three wore, weapons, water-bottle and food-container, they had none. A critical position this for the small party, weaponless and foodless in the waste! A

disarmed man is reckoned as dead in such a wild! Struggling is impossible against the incalculable foes that either crush a solitary adventurer by their mass, or deputise, so to say, some such executioner as he whom we saw to have slain the dog, and we hear to have rid the three Mexicans of their horses and equipments. The story of how this deprivation came about is short and lamentable.

CHAPTER II.

ENVY NO MAN HIS GRAVE.

DON BENITO VASQUEZ DE BUSTAMENTE was the son of that General Bustamente, twice president of the Mexican Republic. When his father, cast down from power, was forced to flee with his family to take final refuge at Guayaquil, the boy was only five or six years old. Suffering with fever, which made the voyage dangerous for him, the child was left at Guaymas in charge of a faithful adherent, who found no better way of saving the son of the proscript from persecution than to take him as one of his own little family up the San José Valley, where he had a ranche. The boy remained there and grew up to the age when we encountered him.

His rough but trusty guardian let the youth run wild, teaching him to ride and shoot as the only needful accomplishments. Benito, falling into the company of the remnant of purer-blooded Indians, supposed to be the last of the original possessors of that region, relished their vagabond life exceedingly. Not only did he spend weeks at a time in hunts with them, with an occasional running fight with the Yagui tribe, and even the Apaches raiding Sonora; but, at the season for pearl-diving, accompanied them in their boats, not only in the Gulf, but down the mainland and up the sea-coast of the Peninsula. Le Paz he knew well, and the Isles of Pearls were familiar in every cranny.

Now, when the news of his father's death in exile came to Benito, he was a hunter and horseman doubled by seaman and pearl-fisher, such as that quarter of the world even seldom sees.

So little on land, both enemies and followers of the co-president lost all trace of the son.

Moreover, in the land of revolution in permanency, the offspring of a once ruler are personally to blame if they call dangerous attention on themselves.

On shore, however, Don Benito had noticed the daughter of a neighbour, one Don José Miranda, formerly in the navy. After a couple of years' wedded life, the latter was left a widower with an only daughter, who had become this charming Dolores, now slumbering under her father's zarape. Her education was confided to a poor sister of the captain, who was about the only enemy young Bustamente had in his courtship. Captain Miranda was very fond of the youth, and it was agreed ere long that there should be a wedding at the *Noria de las Pasioneras* (Well-house of the Passion-flowers) as soon as Benito reached the age of five-and-twenty.

But Donna Maria Josefa had contrary marital projects. Her brother had so many times talked of bestowing the bulk of his considerable fortune on his beloved child, that the lady concluded, rightly or wrongly, that she would be penniless when the niece married. Habituated, since a great while back, to a very easy, not to say pampered existence at her kinsman's expense, she beheld with terror the time coming when her host would settle all his property on the girl, and constitute the strange young man, who was so reserved about his origin, the steward for his young wife. However, Donna Maria Josefa was too sly and adroit to openly oppose the paternal determination, and allow him to perceive the hate she bore Benito and would be only too delighted to manifest.

Whenever she threw out hints of a better match for her niece than this mysterious youth, they had fallen in deaf ears, and she fretted in silence that boded no good prospects.

Nevertheless, some two years had known the young hearts formally engaged without the serpent lifting her head to emit a truly alarming hiss. At that time Donna Maria Josefa introduced at her brother's a hook-nosed gentleman, arrayed sumptuously, who rejoiced in a long name which paraded pretensions to an illustrious lineage. This Don Annibal Cristoval de Luna y Almagro de Cortez so displeased Benito and Dolores, whilst not ingratiating himself deeply with Don José, that his presence would not have been tolerated, only for the young couple hopefully supposing that the tall and bony scion of the first conqueror of Mexico was a flame of Dolores' duenna, and as such would wed the dragon and take her away from the hacienda to the beautiful and boundless domains in Spain, upon which he expatiated in a shrill voice of enthusiasm.

Don Annibal had excellent credentials from a banker's at Guaymas, but, somehow, the gentlemen farmers received him with cold courtesy. Besides, it having been remarked that those who offended him met with injury, personal, like the being waylaid, or in their property, stock being run off or outhouses fired, there sprang up a peculiar way of treating the stranger for which the Spanish *morgue*, that counterpart of English phlegm, is very well suited.

All at once, Benito received word that a messenger from his mother had arrived at Guaymas, bearing the very good news that she expected to obtain a revocation of the sentence of banishment against the brood of Bustamente, and then he could publicly avow his name.

He had already imparted his secret to Captain Miranda.

The messenger had grievously suffered with sea-sickness, and was unable to come up the valley. Miranda counselled Benito to go to him therefore, and besides, as the formalities attending the settlement of his estate upon his daughter, under the marriage contract, required such legal owls as nestled alone in the port, he volunteered to accompany the young man. Over and above all this pleasing arrangement, as Dolores had never seen the city, of which the five thousand inhabitants think no little—for after all it is the finest harbour in the Gulf of California—he proposed she should be of the party.

Another reason, which he did not confide in any one, acted as a spur. A neighbour had told Don José that, from a communication of his major-domo, an expert in border warfare, he believed that the illustrious Don Annibal de Luna was not wholly above complicity with a troop of robbers who lately infested Sonora, and caused as much dread and more damage, forasmuch as they were intelligently directed to the best stores of plunder as the Indians themselves. This neighbour, though he loved Donna Josefa no more cordially than anybody else, still deemed it dutiful to prevent Captain Miranda allowing a "gentleman of the highway" to marry into his family.

Don José felt the caution more painfully, as his sister had plainly let him know that the famous Don Annibal was not so much her worshipper as her niece's. He might have thanked the *salteador* to rid his house of the old maid, but to allow one to court his daughter was another matter. At the same time, as of such dubious characters are made the "colonels" who buckler up a Mexican revolutionary pretender, Don José was scarcely less coldly civil to the hidalgo, though he hastened on the preparations to withdraw his daughter from the swoop of the bird of rapine.

Donna Maria Josefa drew a long face at the prospect of being left alone at the hacienda, but she was too great a dependant on her brother, and too hypocritical to trammel the undertaking.

The party set forth, then, under good and sufficient escort. But the very foul fiend himself appeared to have taken all Donna Maria Josefa's evil wishes in hand to carry them out, to say nothing of the baulked Don Annibal's.

Half the escort left without returning, at a mere alarm of the *Indios bravos* ("hostiles") being at La Palma, and massacring and firing farmhouses wholesale. The rest were lost in the bush, were abandoned dead or dying; the mules and horses were "stampeded" by unseen foes; and finally a fatal bowman slew the two horses which had borne Don José and his daughter in their futile endeavour to regain the lost track; and, to come to the present time, their dog, of whom the instinct had preserved them more than once from death by thirst, had been despatched by the same relentless demon

Still, there was the contradictory consolation which the persistent enemy afforded by these evidences of his bloodthirsty hunt. By a singular anomaly of the human organisation, as long as man knows his fellows are at hand, even though they be enemies, he does not feel utterly stripped of hope. In the depth of his heart, the vaguest of hope sustains and encourages him, though he may not reason about it. But as soon as all human vestiges disappear, the imperceptible human waif on the sea, alone with nature, trembles in full revelation of his paltriness. The colossal surroundings daunt him, and he acknowledges it is folly to struggle with the waves that multitudinously mount up to swamp him from all sides.

Meanwhile, no further occasion to be fearful had been shown, the sun went down, and shot up one short gleam ere the swift darkness shrouded the sky. The howling of wild beasts rushing out to enjoy their time of sport could be traced from the lair to the "licks" and springs.

But our disarmed *gente perdida*, the lost ones, durst not light a fire; had they the means to scare the wolf away, it might have afforded a mark for the unknown archer. Don José wept as he saw his daughter, who pretended to sleep, to give him and her lover less uneasiness. But sleep does not come under these circumstances to them who court it.

Indeed, only those who have undergone the horror of a night in the untamed forest can imagine its poignancy. Lugubrious phantoms people the glades, the wild beasts entone a devilish concert, the limbs of trees seem to be animated into semblances of the really awakened serpents, whose scales can be heard gliding with a slime-softened hush over the bending boughs. None but the experienced can reckon how many ages are compressed in one second of this gruesome "fix," a nightmare of the wakeful, during which the racked mind finds a distorted relish in picturing the most monstrous lucubrations, particularly when the faint yet tantalised appetite sets the brain palpitating with delirium.

After enduring this strain for some hours of the gloom, hope or mere instinct of self-preservation caused Benito to suggest, as one acquainted with hunters

expedients, that the shelter existed by the increasing danger of their position on the ground, was upon the summit of a huge broken cottonwood tree. He assisted Don José to mount to the top, which he found tolerably solid, spite of wet and solar rot, passed him up poor Dolores, and stood on guard at the base. He meant to have kept awake, or, rather, had not the least idea that he should go off to sleep, but famine had passed its acute stage, and fatigue collaborated with it to lull him. The last look he gave upwards showed him vaguely, like a St. Simon Stylites, the elder Mexican on the broad summit of the stump, his daughter reclining on the bed of pith at his feet. Don José was then praying, his face turned to the east, where no doubt he trusted to behold a less unhappy sun than had last scorched them.

Suddenly Don Benito started: something like a hot snake had run down his cheek and buried itself in his bosom. At almost the same instant, whilst he was awakening fully, a smart sting in the left shoulder, preceded by a hissing, short and angry, made the young man utter an exclamation rather in rage than pain.

The sun had risen; at least, he could see about him and be warmed and vivified a little, through a fresh day commenced of intolerable torments.

As he looked up, the repetition of the sensation of the reptile gliding adown his face, but less warm and more slow this time, caused him to apply his hand to the line traversed. He withdrew it speedily, and in disgust—his fingers were smeared with blood!

"Oh, Don José!" he ejaculated. "Dolores, dear!"

Stupefied, speechless, like a statue, the girl upon the natural pedestal was supporting the lifeless body of the old Mexican. An arrow was broken off in his temple, and his beard, roughly sprouted out and white with this week of hardship, was flooded with the blackening blood of which Benito in his post below had received the drip.

The young man stared fiercely around, and instantly perceiving something on the move in the thicket, sprang up the tree.

At the same time aimed at him to redeem the marksman for his first failure, which had lodged the shaft in the young Mexican's shoulder instead of his head or his heart; a second projectile of the same description whizzed into the gap between his legs, opened by his leap, and smote a knot so violently as to shiver into a dozen splinters.

Unable for want of strength to keep his hold, the youthful Mexican slipped down to the ground. Then, facing about in frenzy of indignation, as being so badgered by the unknown, he called out savagely:

"Coward! confront the last of your victims, if you have a drop of manly blood!"

Because he had concluded his last shot serious, or from disdain for his antagonist, or sheer recklessness—for it is not likely that a savage so far forgot his training as to let such a white man's taunt sting him into the imprudence—the Indian who had dogged the unfortunate trio stalked out of the underwood, and only ceased his advance when a lance length from the desperate man who had invoked him.

"*Presente!*" he said in Spanish, with a hoarse chuckle, as in one glance he saw the insensible young female form beside the dead Mexican, and Don Benito's weak condition.

Indeed, the latter, instead of carrying out his implied threat, tottered back and leaned against the cottonwood, just under one arrow, and with the other shattered shaft bristling at his shoulder.

The red man chose to interpret this movement as a flattery for his warlike

appearance, for he smiled contentedly, and, drawing his long knife, cried holding up three fingers of his left hand,

"*La Garra de Rapina*—the Claw of Rapine—will now take his harvest for thrice five days' toil."

Benito sought to summon his failing powers, but a mist seemed to spring up and becloud his gaze, through which he less and less clearly saw the Indian's slow and cruel approach. Nevertheless, he was about to make a snatch at hazard for the steel that rose over his bosom, when a flash of fire from a gun so near that he almost saw the hither extremity blind the redskin, preceded a shot that crashed through the latter's skull. Benito, unable to check his own leap, received the dead yet convulsed body in his arms, and the shock hurled him to the ground. Neither rose! One was dead; the other within an ace of the same impassable portals. It seemed to him, as he lost consciousness, that there was a struggle in the brush.

When Benito reopened his eyes he believed all had been a dream, but, on gazing anxiously about him, he saw the dead Indian by his side. Above him, too, when he rose on his knees by an effort, the two silent witnesses of his miraculous deliverance were still recumbent.

No trace of another living soul; nevertheless, the Indian's weapons had all disappeared.

Suddenly, as he lifted himself to his feet, aching all over as if he had been bastinadoed on every accessible place, he heard Dolores moan. She was animated by the acute racking of hunger.

He gasped, "Food! food for her!" and reeled to the greenest spot, where he began to tear up the earth with his nails. At length he dislodged a little stem of yucca, the somewhat tasty root which yields a species of maniac.

When he returned to the tree, Dolores, horrified at seeing her father's blood, had fallen off the tree top, rather than climbed down, and was too insensible to hear his appeals. He dragged the Indian's body partly aside, for to do so wholly was too weighty a task, and heaped leaves over the other portion. He placed the root in Dolores' passive hands, and was about to repeat his hoarse babble of hope, which he did not feel at heart, when abruptly the arrow wound in his shoulder gave a sharp, deep, scorching sensation, which filled him from head to sole with fever and awe.

"Oh, heavens!" he groaned. "The arrow was poisoned! I shall die in madness! I shall, perhaps, tear her, my dear Dolores, in my blind, ungovernable rage!"

So feels the man whom hydrophobia has seized upon, as the latest promptings of reason bid him hie aloof from his endangered fellows.

Benito laid his glances about him wildly; his recently dull eyes blazed till his very features, already earthy, lit up, and he howled:

"Welcome, death! but anywhere save here!"

He trampled on the Indian corpse in his flight, and plunged into the thorns as if bent on rending himself to shreds. He must have rushed madly on for half-an-hour, the venom firing his thinned blood till his veins ran flames, but as the wound on his left side affected that portion of the frame disproportionately, he described a circle, and in the end had almost returned to the spot where Dolores still rested in a swoon.

At last, stumbling, groping, he fell, only to crawl a little way, then, a slight mound opposing his hands and knees, he rolled upon it. His head appeared to have been cleared by the Mazeppa-like course, and he was, at least, conscious of the raised grass reminding him of a funeral mound.

"A grave!" he breathed, dashing the sweat out of his eyes, "yes, a grave; here will the last of the Bustamentes die!"

He stretched out at full length, he folded his arms, one of them palsied already, and was beginning to pray, when his tone changed to joy, or at least, profound hopefulness. He fell over on his side, then rose to his knees, ran his hand over the mound eagerly, and cried:

"God of mercy, deceive me not! the grave I coveted, is it not a *cache?* Thank God!"

CHAPTER III.

THE PIRATE'S BEQUEST.

THE wanderer whose careless progress through the brake sufficiently clearly revealed that he was a stranger of a bold heart and contempt for customs different from his own, was, in fact, one of those Englishmen who seem born to illustrate, in the nature of exceptions, the formal character of his race.

Left an orphan in the fetters of a trustee who forgot he had ever been young, and showed no sympathy with his charge, George Frederick Gladsden had broken his bondage and run away from school at the age of twelve. Reaching a Scotch port, after a long tramp, he shipped as boy on a herring-fisher, and so made his novitiate with Neptune. After that initiation, very severe, he chose to become a sailor of that irregular kind which is known as the *pier head jumping*. That is to say, instead of duly entering on a vessel and book at the office in broad daylight, "George" would lounge on the wharf till the very moment of her casting off. Then, of course, the captain is happy to take anybody in the least nautical or even able-bodied, who offers himself in lieu of one of the regularly engaged mariners detained by accident, debt, or drink. By this means Gladsden's trustee and kinsfolk could never prevent him going wheresoever he willed, and it pleased this briny Arab to keep his whereabouts a mystery, though, to amuse himself and annoy his guardian, he would send him a letter from some dreadfully out-of-the-way port, just to show he did exist, and to prevent the estate being locked up or diverted under the law.

Meanwhile, the young roaming Englishman became so thorough a proficient in the honourable calling, and had so much courage and intelligence that, even in the merchant service, where the prizes are few and hotly fought for, he must have obtained a supportable, if not a brilliant position.

Unfortunately for himself he had an execrably fitful head, and was the declared foe of Draconian discipline. If there had been pirates on the seas he might even have joined them, only then to have enjoyed a delightful existence of "Jack his own master."

Quarrelling with his latest skipper, a seal-hunter, on the Lower Californian coast, that Spaniard, rather alarmed at the turbulent mate, was relieved when he accepted the offer of a Hermosillo planter to become his manager, and not

only broke the engagement between them, but presented Gladsden with some dollars and his gun on their parting. The Englishman promised well up in the country, but the fowl in the swamp allured him into hunting trips with some Indians, and he turned such a vagabond that the indolent Sonoran came to the conclusion that, as the skipper of the seal-fur cruiser had warned him, he had contracted with a maniac.

One day, Gladsden and the Indians, turning their backs on the San Miguel swamps, wandered off, the Englishman cared not whither. His dusky comrades were soon displeased by his careless march, and a little later, disgusted by his even resenting their counsels for him to take precautions, since, not only were there other Indians "out," but one of the most notorious salteadores who had ever troubled any part of unquiet Mexico was overawing the whole of the tract between the San Miguel and the San José. To which the mad Englishman replied, with a calmness which startled the red men, though masters of self-repression, that such daring traits aroused in him a lively curiosity, and the strongest desire to face this very famous Matasiete, "the Slayer of Seven," the terror of Sonora.

Seeing this obstinacy, our sly Yaguis solved the perplexity by abandoning their burr one morning whilst he was still sleeping, and leaving him only his gun and what powder and ball he carried. His horse and other property they removed with them lest, in his folly, he should only turn the valuables over to the redskins not of their tribe, or the Mexican depredators.

For all of his maritime knowledge which helps the student of sky and weather on land, Gladsden was in a quandary when thus thrown on his own devices. As, however, he never wrangled with himself, he took up his solitary march without any self-communing, and followed the impulse of the moment.

Fortunately, game never failed him, and though the only flavouring was gunpowder, the fare had not palled upon him up to his coming within our circle of vision.

He was "loping" along, very like a sated wolf, listless, when he unexpectedly, and by the purest chance, spied the gleaming body of an Indian, stealing before him amongst the foliage, always in the thickest parts.

His resolve awakening to give the Yaguis a lecture, with cuts of the ramrod, upon the "Fault of Abandoning a Hunting Companion in the Desert," he quickened his pace, but almost immediately perceived that the savage was another guess sort of a bird, one more likely, armed for war as he was, and determined of aspect as ever was a brave, to deal out punishment than receive it unrequitingly.

In fact, the fierce, hungry, set face of the pursuer of the Mexican protectors of Donna Dolores would have sufficed to impress even a more nonchalant person than our Englishman.

"Mischief in the wind," thought he.

And as a white man on seeing a man of another hue on the trail, at once believes that the object of the chase is one of his own colour, he turned to, and, having no other intentions to overrule, began to dog the slayer of Don José de Miranda as successfully and closely as he was following the Mexicans. It was not to be expected that the foreigner did not make blunders in this man-hunt, so novel to him, but his very incaution or missteps actually helped him, for the savage, unable to believe that a man would dream of breaking a twig noisily in a wild perhaps not devoid of certain enemies, attributed the two or three alarming sounds in his rear to animals, from whom he had nothing to dread.

In brief, Gladsden arrived at the halting-place of the Mexicans in time to see poor Benito make his stand, and hear the savage, as he disclosed himself, utter

the arrogant "*Presente!*" as he bared his knife to complete his triple tragedy.

The Englishman saw there was a flutter of a woman's dress that appealed to his gallantry, the blood splashes from Don José on the stump, and the valiant but weak port of Don Benito. He feared that to jump towards the Apache would not stay that ugly knife, so he lifted the gun which was Captain Soanez's parting gift, and sent a bullet through the warrior's head.

As quickly upon the echoes of the report, as if it had been a signal, and, for that matter, the two men who bounded upon the marksman had been afraid to "tackle" him whilst his firearm was "full"—a standing item in prairie-fighting—the Englishman was set upon by a man on either side. Spite of his strength he was hurled off his feet, and secured with a lariat and gagged with moss, all with a celerity which proved that he had been overcome by bandits of no despicable experience. When he was perfectly incapacitated from more than winking, as one of the fellows remarked in a whisper, that facetious rogue warily proceeded to inspect the result of the shot.

It had so laudably obeyed its impulsion, that the Mexican, after one look at the Indian, felicitated himself on not having been so precipitate as to draw that bullet on himself.

The spot was quiet, Benito, clotted red smearing his shoulder, seemed as lifeless as the red man. The young girl and her father, whose blood reddened her ragged dress, were equally among the lifeless, to all cursory examination.

The Mexican picked up the weapons of the Indian, said: "A lone Chiricagui Apache!" as he spurned the body out of wantonness, and returned to his comrades.

"The captain will be gratified, Farruco," said he, pushing the Indian's weapons within his sash; "there they all lie, in a heap, the Don, the daughter and their young companion, with the Chiricagui who was hired to dog them to the death, slain by our chalky-faced long-shot here."

"If we cut his throat, Pepillo, then we shall make a clearance of the whole cluster," returned Farruco, complacently, even laying his hand on the buck-horn haft of a knife.

"A word to that! you are always for taking the crowning pleasure of a running-down! Am I to have no thanks even for having saved you from running your hasty head against this heretic's gun? A thousand demons shall not rob me of my prey! You have already grabbed his gun! I will have the cutting of his throat."

The silenced object of this very pretty growing dispute looked up calmly, but sufficiently interested, be sure, out of his gray eyes.

"One moment, let us throw dice for 'the pleasure!'"

"Nonsense! we all know the topheaviness of *your* dice."

The other duly laughed at this allusion to a vantage which is not always accepted as a compliment.

"Let us draw leaves—long or short!"

"I agree, Pepillo; there's a bayonet-palm at your elbow."

The Mexican turned to gather a couple of leaves of different length, when the captive saw the face of his comrade shine with a hellish joy. Noiseless he drew out the Indian's tomahawk from his belt and in another second he would have buried it in the back of the unsuspecting bandit. The monstrous fondness for cruelty which impelled this wanton murder was so repugnant to the Englishman that he, bound too tightly for any other movement, rolled himself, by working his elbow and knee, right against the feet thrown forward of the traitor. The shock was not enough to make the blow fully miscarry, but the axe only cleft

the wretch's collar-bone, glancing the flesh to one side along it on partial withdrawal with an agony imparted which made the recipient yell. He flung himself round, and drawing his knife at the same inappreciable second of time, broke through the other's guard with the hatchet, and buried the blade in his heart so forcibly that the hilt drove his breath out of his lungs with a loud sound. Farruco pitched over upon the Englishman, and died before he had ceased his groan of despair.

The wounded outlaw sat himself down, without any but self-concern, to attend to his wound, to which he applied a dressing of chewed leaves. Then studying the scene, he suddenly became conscious that the movement of the log-like form of the prisoner between his assassin's legs had saved his life, if, always granted, it were a curable wound.

Without a word, like a man who fears to hesitate in his formation of a good but novel whim, lest he revokes its realisation to remain consistent with his daily and worse nature, Pepillo, without wiping the fatal knife, severed the leather thongs around Gladsden.

"One good turn," said he, sententiously, as becomes a Spaniard, but prudently setting his foot on the gun of which the captive was despoiled.

"Yes, he meant to split your skull, that's all," remarked the latter, sitting up and chafing his limbs to restore the circulation. "He was a pirate; and you have only anticipated his suspension at a yardarm."

Pepillo paid no attention to him. He had picked up the Indian's hatchet, and seemed to be regarding with an antiquarian zeal the design traced in an idle moment or two, now and then, with the hunting knife. Then, contracting his brow more in terror than in pain, and turning pale in the same increasing dread rather than from loss of blood, he ejaculated:

"The villain! the assassin! It is a copper-bronze hatchet! I am poisoned! I shall die of lockjaw!" Then, noting the incredulous expression of the bystander, who had, however, been sufficiently sympathetic as to rise to his throbbing feet and lean towards the sufferer, "I tell you, Pagan, that the Indian was one of the *Apachos Emponzonadores*—the sect of the Poison-Hatchets, and I am—the Lord and my patron saint forgive me—a dead man!"

Gladsden looked at the tomahawk, and, after the man's utterance, thought the metal head gave out a sinister gleam. Then, recalling all he ever knew of copper poisoning, he said:

"Let me attend to the cut," in a tone which made the sufferer see that he was taken as the victim of terror rather more than mortal pain.

Still, as the gash was beyond his simple remedy, the Indian cataplasm which should have allayed the fiery feeling which even augmented from the first, Pepillo yielded to his late enemy like a child, with that compliance of the Latin races under mortal injury.

A seafarer knows much about cuts, and so, at the first glance after removing the herb poultice, Gladsden recognised that the cut, clean in infliction, was aggravated shockingly.

"You see!" cried the Mexican, triumphantly, as far as the victory over the other's disbelief was concerned, but with acute agony at his certainty being confirmed; "am I not a lost man?"

"In that case," replied the Englishman, taking up his gun and charging it methodically out of Farruco's powder-horn as the nearest, "I will go and see about the wearer of that woman's dress whom I caught a glimpse of yonder, when you and your mate all but anticipated my shot at that screeching savage."

"Don't leave me!"

"But I must! Gallantry, my dear ex-captor."

"Leave me not!" reiterated Pepillo, who had supported himself with his gun whilst the Englishman had looked at his hurt, "for the sake of my widow and four little ones."

"A bandit with a family," observed Gladsden. "This is curious."

"Yes; who know not of my mode of life," appealed the salteador, falling into a seated position and clasping his hands. "By the rules of our band—for I am one of the Caballeros de la Noche, of Matasiete—all my goods fall in to the gang! but my wife—my Angela! my little ones—my angelitos! have still more compassion, you greatly noble American of the North, and hear my *vivâ voce* testament in their behalf."

"Go on," was the reply. "Considering where the commissioner to take oaths—who is only an Englishman, by the way, and no American of the Northern States—where he has his office opened, and the improbability of his traversing a wilderness of poisonous vermin of all descriptions to file your testament, it is a pure formality. However," he added, the while the dying robber divided his time between a disjointed supplication and wrestlings against a pain that convulsed him severely at intervals more and more closely recurrent, "will away your 'bacca-box and your knife and sash. I'll do my best to carry them to the legatees."

"Listen to me," said Pepillo solemnly, and beckoning him to approach. His voice was singular in sound; his features contorted, his clayey, pale face streaming with cold, thick perspiration. "I have not always been a ranger of the prairie. I was a sailor, like you are, as I caught in your speech. Do you know the islands on the other coast of the Gulf of California?"

"I have only sailed round to Guaymas."

"I will draw you the chart. Due north from Cantador Island I have a treasure. Laugh not, raise no brow in derision. In coin and emeralds, gold, silver, and pearls, I have over a million dollars."

"Nonsense!"

"I am the last of the band of Colonel Dartois the Filibuster, and I tell you I am the sole treasurer of the crew."

The Englishman was not acquainted with that adventurer, of much notoriety in his day on the Pacific Coast, but the tone of the dying man was sincere.

"Be quick, then, thou dying one, to give the clue," said he as if convinced, whether so or not.

CHAPTER IV.

A DESERT MYSTERY.

UPON this enjoinder of so eminently practical a nature, and thoroughly aware of the necessity of haste, the fallen Mexican rapidly drew with his ram-rod end, upon a space of earth smoothed by his foot in its deerskin boot, like an antique tablet under the stylus, a map—rude, but, to a navigator, plain and ample.

"At this point," said he, "a sunken reef trends north and south, with a break at a little bow a quarter-mile from the black rock that juts out all but flush with its ripple. Deep water in 'the pot,' and there we anchored to ride to a submerged buoy, so that the canker-worm would not attack the metal or the borer the wood—a chest, bound with yellow metal. If it shall have broke away, its weight would only have sunk it deep in the oyster bed, all the shells there smashed to powdery scales by the drags. A diver will find it for you, then.

"Now, swear to me!" he went on, forcing his weakening voice to keep an even tenor. "Swear that one-half the contents of that hiding-place shall be Ignazio Santamaria's, my brother-in-law's, who will give enough to his sister, my Angela. And the rest—be it yours, brave and Christian heart."

Whether he was only fostering a delusion, or accepting a commission that would enrich him, Gladsden nodded assent.

"But, swear!"

"I give you my word, as an English gentleman," said he, obstinately.

"I am content."

"And what is there stowed there away?" with a smile of his former discredit "copper bolts?"

"Pearls! the choicest from Carmen Island to Acapulco."

"Well, that sounds natural enough. The next thing is, where shall I find your brother Ignazio and the rest of the family, Master Pepillo Santamaria?"

Poignant anguish rendered the other unconscious of external matter for a period; he clutched his head with both hands as if to pervent the bones flying asunder, then recovering his senses, as the paroxysm quitted him, he said,

"You have not far to go for my brother. As for the dear ones, they are at the old town of Guaymas. My brother is here——"

"Here! the devil!" looking round and falling on guard.

"At the Mound Tower." He pointed with a wavering finger to the north-east. "Not two hours' ride, our rendezvous—a robber's rendezvous—but have no fear! Ignazio is second of the band,—remember, his sister's fortune is at stake! Call him out from among the crew—the signal, our private signal, two *miaows* of the catamount — Ignazio is known as the *Gattomontes*, mark! Have mercy! Remember the pearls! my wife—my little angels! pity!"

Gladsden averted his gaze not to witness an agony which he could not stay relieve or bid cease. When he looked on Pepillo again, he was dead.

As it threatened to come on dark, not only by the disappearance of the sun, but by a storm, which the seaman divined, rather than perceived in progress, he bent a silver coin, so as to make a species of pencil, with the point at the double, and using some cigarette paper, copied off, "in silver point," the map which the dead pirate, *cum* pearl-fisher, *plus* highwayman, had designed on the ground bedewed with his blood. Whilst so employed, the Englishman repeated to himself, like a scholar beating a lesson into his brain, the instructions connected with this singular testament.

Recalling his intention before the robber's appeal had distracted him, Gladsden, gun in hand, marched with a determination not to be cried "halt!" to again, towards the huge cottonwood stump, by which he marked the scene of the Mexican standing at bay against the Apaches.

The latter's remains were there, a fresh-made grave (covered with stones and brambles to prevent the attack of the quadrupedal ghouls to which the luckless red man was consigned, in most probability), concealed Don José de Miranda from the searcher's eyes. A fragment of Dolores' attire was all that prevented

Gladsden from supposing he had been the prey of an illusion as to a woman having also occupied that natural pedestal. To complete the puzzle a spade of North-American make was carelessly lying by the fresh mound.

"Hilli-ho! ahoy there!" cried the Englishman, fortified against fear of the bandits by the claim he had upon the lieutenant of the band, and caring not a jot for Indians or others, since he had his gun in shooting order.

But save the mocking of birds there was no rejoinder.

Afar he heard thunder, though.

"A mound tower must be prominent," he mused, "and this thicket in a torrent-rain and a tornado is worse accommodation than the toughest highwayman must accord the bearer of an inheritance. I'll make for the Mound Tower, and implore Senyor Don El Sostenedor, of the most glorious robber chief What's-his-name, for a corner of his stronghold, a chunk of deer's meat, and a swig of pulque."

He returned to the two dead men, loaded his belt with such of their weapons as completed, not to say repleted, a portable arsenal, which an Albanian janissary would have envied, and, with the same heedlessness as to south-western travelling precautions which had heretofore distinguished him, stepped manfully away from the haunt of murder. Ere he had taken half-a-dozen strides, he heard many a soft padded foot in the bushes; the volunteer sextons of the prairie were flocking to entomb the dead in their unscrupulous maw.

The thunder boomed more audible, and the eagle screamed defiance over the lonely adventurer's head.

CHAPTER V.

THE GODSEND.

THE inhabitants of the wilderness, red or white, black or yellow, obliged often to "let go of all," as our sailor friend would word it, and "get" (as he would probably say if his foolhardy behaviour allowed him to live long enough in that region to acquire the cant language), and pretty suddenly too, to follow the chase or avoid an ambush, are necessitated to abandon their plunder and traps, using these words in their legitimate sense. As, at the same time, they have no inclination to renounce their property, they bank it, or, as the trappers say, *cache* it.

The model *cache* is thus constructed: The first thing is to spread blankets or buffalo robes around the chosen spot for the excavation, which is scooped out in any desirable shape with knives and flat stones; all the extracted ground, loam, sand, or whatever its nature, being carefully put on the spreads. When the pit is sufficiently capacious it is lined with buffalo hides to keep out damp, and the valuables are deposited within, even packed up in hide, if necessary. The earth is restored and trodden down, or rammed firmly with the rifle-butts, water is sometimes sprinkled on the top to facilitate the settling, and upon the replaced sod to prevent it dying after the injury to its roots. All the earth left over is carried to a running water, or scattered to the four winds, so as to make

the least evidences of the concealment vanish. The *cache* is generally so well hidden that only the eye of an uncommonly gifted man can discover it. Often, then, he only chances upon one that has been opened and emptied by the owners, who, after that, of course, were easy in their second operation. The contents of a well-constructed *cache* may keep half-a-dozen years without spoiling.

Benito Bustamente believed he had been led to die upon a *cache.*

To a man dropping of fatigue and famine such a find was of inestimable value. It might reasonably offer him the primary necessities of which he was denuded, and he would be revived, literally, on being furnished with the means to fight his way to civilisation, where otherwise he and Dolores, always hoping the young girl had not preceded him past the bourne, must perish.

For a few instants, propped up on both hands, in a wistful attitude, which I never saw in a pictorial representation of a human being, but which was recalled to me by the pose of the bloodhound in Landseer's picture of the trail of blood, in which floats a broken plume.

A moment of suspense!

He was swayed by indefinable sensations, fascinated, so as to be fearful of breaking the spell.

When, at length, he mastered his emotion, he did not forget the duty of an honest man constrained to invade the property of another, though that other might be his enemy!

Trapper law is explicit; wanton breaking into a *cache* is punishable by death.

So he shaped out a square of the sod with a sharp mussel-shell which he spied a-glistening near him, and slowly removed that piece, anxiously quivering in the act. Other turf he removed in the same manner, more and more sure that it was a *cache.* This preliminary over, he paused to take breath, and to enjoy the luxury of discounting a pleasure which came as veritable life in the midst of death.

Then he resumed a task terrible for one exhausted by privations and loss of blood. Many times he was forced to stop, his energy giving out.

Slow went on the work; no indications of his being correct arose to corroborate his surmise. The shell broke, but then he used the two fragments, held in his hand with such tenacity that they seemed to be supplementary nails. Vain as was the toil, here lay, he still believed, the sole chance of safety; if heaven smiled on his efforts, his darling Dolores might yet be a happy woman. So he clung to this last chance offered by happy hazard with that energy of despair, the immense power of Archimedes, for which nothing is impossible.

The hole, of no contemptible size, yawned blankly before him. Nothing augured success, and, whatever the indomitable energy of the young man's character, he felt discouragement cast a new gloom over his soul. His eyelids, red with fever, licked up the tear that ventured to soothe them, and his lips cracked as he pressed them together.

"At least, here I dig a grave for Don José, and my poor love," he said wildly. "It shall be deep enough to baffle the wolf!"

He renewed his tearing at the soil, when suddenly the shells snapped off, both pieces together, and his nails also scraping something of a different material to the earth, turned back at their jagged ends, but not at that supreme moment giving him the pain which at another time the same accident must have caused. Some hairs were mingled with the earth, and a scent different from that of the freshly bared ground intoxicated him with its musk.

Disdaining the shattered mussel-shell, he used his hands as scoops, and presently unearthed a buffalo skin.

Instead of tugging at it with greedy relish to feast on the treasure it doubtlessly muffled, Benito drew back his hands and stared with worse tribulation than ever.

A *cache*—yes! A full one—who knew?

Long ago it might have been pillaged. With but one movement between him and the verification or annihilation of his hopes the Mexican hesitated. He was frightened.

His labour under difficulties had been so great, he had cherished so many dreams and nursed so many chimeras, that he instinctively dreaded the seeing them swiftly to flee, and leave him falling from his crumbling anticipations into the frightful reality that closed in upon him with inexorable jaws.

In the end, determined to do or die, for to that it had truly come, Benito's trembling hands buried themselves in the buffalo robe, clutched it irresistibly and hauled it up into his palpitating bosom. His haggard eyes swam with joyful gush of many tears, so that he could not see the sky to which he had raised them in gratitude.

Benito had fallen on a hunter's and trapper's store. Not only were there traps and springes of several sorts, weapons, powder horns, bullet-bags, shot-moulds, leaden bars, horse caparisons, hide for lassoes, but eatables in hermetically-sealed tins of modern make, not then familiar to Mexicans, and liquor in bottles protected by homemade wicker and leather plaiting.

He was stretching out his hands ravenously to the bottles and a role of jerked beef, when it seemed to him that the voice of the Unseen prompted him with "God! thank God!" and repeating the words in a voice unintelligible from stifling emotions, he fairly swooned across the pit as if to defend it with his poor, worn, hard-tried body.

His face was serene when he unclosed his eyes anew. Soberly, by a great control, he ate of some tinned meat and the crackers and swallowed as slowly some cognac. The latter filled him with fire, and he could have leaped into a tree-top and crowed defiance to the vultures which were sailing overhead as if baulked of their prey.

In that momentary calmness, he felt so strong and so rejoiced in his self-command that his spirit seemed to spurn its casket. But instantly, with the blood careering anew, the wound in his shoulder smarted furiously, and all down that arm and up to his neck he felt a strange and novel sensation; it was as if molten lead was in the veins, scorching and making heavy the limb.

"The arrow! I am poisoned!" he muttered. "Oh, is this windfall come merely to embitter my death!"

That taste of liquor made his mouth water, and there was suggested to him by the sight of the brandy bottle that here was the remedy which the wisest frontiersman and medicine man would have prescribed. He put the cognac to his lips, and emptied the bottle.

Almost instantly he felt an aching in every pore away and beyond that of the wound; his brain appeared to swell to bursting its cell, and howling himself hoarse, he thought—though, in reality, his inarticulate cries were strangled in his throat—he rolled upon the ground, too weak to dance upon his feet, as he imagined he was doing.

This intoxication left him abruptly, and he fell insensible. But for his stertorious breathing, which finally became regular and gentle, he was as a corpse beside the greedy grave.

He woke up, lame in every bone, but clear-eyed, and the ringing in his head abated. Either the remedy had succeeded, or constitution, for he was able to set about his task with surprising vigour.

Thereupon, he chose out of the store a pair of revolvers, their cartridges in quantity, two powder-horns and bullets to fit the finest rifle, a bowie-knife and a cutlass, and a length of leather thong to make a lasso, and a spade for the grave of Don José, filled a game bag with matches in metal boxes, sewing materials, and other odds and ends for the traveller. Tobacco, too, he took, and was looking for paper to make cigarettes, when a small book met his eyes.

It was stamped in gold, "London, Liverpool, and West State of Mexico Agnas Caparrosas Mining Company." It was an account book of the company —one of those enterprises to which, he had heard, his father had lent a favourable attention. A pencil was attached to the book; he wrote on a blank page the list of all the articles he took, signing,

"Require the payment of me.—I, BENITO VASQUEZ DE BUSTAMENTE."

As quickly as he could he replaced what he did not wish to be burdened with, made the concealment good, and swept the grass with two buffalo skins, which he had also taken for clothing. This duty of a thankful and honourable man being accomplished, he darted back to where he had left Dolores with a free and easy movement, of which he had not believed himself ever again to be capable only a short time before.

He was amazed that a little food and spirit had restored him, and began to fear the reaction.

His wits remained clear. He remembered very distinctly indeed his confrontation of the savage who had been blasted as by a heavenly thunderbolt. He was not surprised when he found that redskin where he had rolled him. But what was his pain when he saw no trace of Dolores but the same fragment of her dress which Gladsden was, soon after, also to behold!

Sounds in the chaparral which reminded him of the four-footed scavengers in rivalry of the carrion birds that circled above, urged him to ply the spade, and he piously laid Don José to his final rest.

Then, his rifle loaded, his frame fortified by the refreshment which he took at intervals on his march, he went forward in the trail which the abductor of the Mexican's daughter had been unable, so burdened, to avoid making manifest, all his emotions, even gratitude to the chief, set aside for the desire of vengeance on the remorseless foes to whom he owed so many and distressful losses, and on whom he had not yet been enabled to inflict any reprisal.

"Let me but overtake him, or them," thought he, "before the tempest obliterates this track with its deluge, and I will flesh this sword, or essay this new rifle on his vile carcass!"

CHAPTER VI.

ANY PORT IN A STORM.

GLADSDEN was groping along when he perceived the thorn thicket changing into a prairie, only slightly interspersed with scrub. At the same time, though underfoot, the scene cleared, the indications of atmospherical perturbation increased in number and in ominous importance. Already the material man triumphed over the romantic one, and our Englishman thought considerably

better of a solid refuge from the tempest than to come up with the abductor of the Mexican girl. Spite of its sinister aspect, therefore, his eyes were delighted when he saw, outlined against the north-eastern sky, sullenly blackening, a curiously shaped tower. In a civilised country he would have ignobly supposed it a factory shaft.

He knew nothing whatever about this pillar of sun-baked bricks, some fifty feet in altitude, and, we repeat, cared nothing for the monument from any point of view but its qualities as a shelter.

Nevertheless, an archæologist would have given a fortune to have studied this Nameless Tower, for the aboriginal held it too sacred for mention in common parlance. It was slightly pyramidal; the north side, not quite the true meridian, presented a right angle, presumably to breast and divide the wind of winter prevalent at its erection, while the rest was rounded trimly. The excellence of the work was better shown in the cement, not mud, or ground gypsum, having resisted the weather and particularly the sandy winds themselves, though they had worn the *dobies* (*adobes*, sun-dried bricks) away deeply in places, without making air-holes through. There was nothing like a window or depression save these natural pits, until the view reached the ragged top, where a sort of lantern or cupola, so far as a few vestiges indicated, had once crowned the edifice; there the floor of this disappeared chamber had become the roof, and an orifice, perhaps a loophole enlarged by rot, yawned like a deepset eye beside an arm of metal terminating in a hook. Presumably the column was a priest's watch-tower, where a sacred fire was preserved in peace times to imitate the sun. It is known, the ancient Mexicans adored the sun. A beacon, too, in war times, for the fire and smoke signal code of the American Indians is too complete to have been the invention of yesterday. The entrance at the base cut in the rock utilised for nearly all the foundation. Once blocked up, the watcher, remote from lances, sling-shots, and bowshots, could count the besiegers on this plain, and telegraph their number to his friends at a distance. The metal arm may have suspended a pulley-block and rope by which provisions and even an assistant could be hauled up to him.

The natives avoid the tower and its proximity. The white rovers deem it uncanny, and, having no curiosity to gratify, also leave the spot untroubled.

Gladsden regarded the tall mass with some uneasiness as he approached sufficiently near to measure its dimensions and examine the emblems stained, rather than painted, on the alabaster basestone. A colossal half-human, half-bovine head, armed with terrible horns, and showing long angular teeth in a ferocious grin, was prominent among these designs.

All was so still that he hesitated to wake the echoes with a more or less tolerable imitation of the wild cat, to which no response came, or if from a distance such was raised, the approaching thunder-peals overcame it.

He boldly plunged into the doorless passage, the way to which had been to a more wary man suspiciously free from brambles.

A smell of smoke, and even of tobacco smoke, he thought, overcame that of damp earth.

The only light was that which the doorway admitted, but several plates of mica, backed rudely with metal, which time and damp had tarnished, made the interior a little less sombre by their dull reflections. A ladder of wood, all the fastenings of raw hide, could be distinguished climbing like a twin-snake up the wall; on high a grayish eye seemed to look unwinkingly down: it was the light oozing in at the gap at the top.

There were red streaks on the wall: paintings in red pipe-clay partially

ffaced, or mementoes of slaughter, just as the spectator chose to believe or ancy.

At the moment, the intruder was chiefly interested in the charcoal under his eet, almost warm, certainly so fresh that he concluded that others than he chose t for a refuge under stress of weather, no doubt Master Pepillo's congeners.

Less courageous, he would have shrunk away without pondering over the ature of his predecessors, possibly regular hosts of this lugubrious domicile of wl and vulture.

Convinced that he was, for the time being, the sole tenant, Gladsden re-olved, however, to explore the portion unrevealed. To his hands and feet the adder presented no obstacle, and he ran up the rough rattlins swiftly, spite of atigue. It brought him into a species of manhole under the roof, close to the ap, and yet shielded from its draft by a jutting piece of wall.

"This will do," thought he, finding it dry and clean; "I will kill a brace of irds frightened into stupidity by the oncoming storm, roast them on that harcoal, and bring them up here for supper. If the robbers surprise me, I will naintain that I was merely killing time before the arrival of Lieutenant Ignazio, nd claim that gentleman's friendship by reason of my charge from his brother. f I am interrupted, I shall pull up the ladder, in trust that it will come free, nd sleep here, safe from prowling beasts and serpents."

Suddenly gloom fell on all the landscape, as if a mighty hand had eclipsed he waning sun. The air was very much more thick and oppressive, and there ere innumerable though faint crepitations like feeble snappings of electricity. o take the game he spoke of, before the rainfall drowned them out of their ests, it was needful to hasten. But he had not descended three rounds of the adder, before he stopped all of a piece. From every side, there was the sound of n arrival of men, both on foot and a-horse. Instinctively he drew himself p, arranged his form on the floor so as to project only his forehead and eyes ver the ledge where ended the means of ascension, and stared below.

A number of persons, congratulating themselves on their reunion loudly with he hyperbolic phrases of the Spanish ceremony of greeting, clattered into the ower. Presently a light was struck, and a roaring fire kindled. As the shaft hus became the chimney, Gladsden was forced to cough, though he smothered he sound as much as possible, hoped, as did the man who lighted the damp ood, that it would lose no time in burning up clearly.

When he could protrude his face over the peephole again, he beheld a ozen persons, swarthy, robust, richly clad as the prairie rovers, or cattle hieves, armed to the teeth. Cruel of eye, malignant and ferocious, he judged it ighly imprudent to make their acquaintance, unless Ignazio was the introducer.

Before very many sentences were uttered, every syllable of which came to his ars direct, the over-hearer was not allowed to cherish any error as to their rofession. They were the Gentlemen of the Night, the road-robbers, the courges of Sonora, belonging to the squad (*cuadrilla*) of Matasiete, "the Slayer of Seven."

The gestures of the Mexicans grew animated as they sat around the fire, or eaned against the wall, which the gleams showed to be painted by the Indians; ow and then they clapped their unwashed but jewelled hands to their weapons—t which moments the witness earnestly prayed that they would join in a free ght and kill every one to the last. They were wrangling over the division of spoil, and perhaps the plunder would have cost additional lives to those of its riginal proprietors, when the advent of some one in authority caused the ispute to cease. It was their captain.

He was not the heroic figure that Gladsden had imagined fit to rule such

desperadoes. He was tall, but lean, Don Quixote with Punch's nose and chin, rather the fox than the wolf, and though his features were set stern and his voice was savage, doubts might be conceived as to his own reliance on his bullying mode of government.

"At your differences again," he cried in a sharp voice, which now and then ran up shrill and high, spite of himself, more to the resemblance of the puppet-show hero than ever. "*Caray!* why can't you pull together like honourable gentlemen of the prairie?"

Two of the brigands began an explanation which their leader cut short by replying to the less ruffianly of the two:

"Silence! I'll not be bothered by a single word! *Viva Dios!* Here you are hugging the fire like herders broiling a steak, without a thought of our common safety. I have had to post sentries myself, and even they grumbled at such important duty, just because there is a barrel of water coming down. I tell you I heard a shot in the thicket, which was not from any of our guns."

Another of the gang spoke up, with whom he judged it meet to argue. It is due to the estimable Captain Matasiete to say that the debater in question was picking a fragment of buffalo beef out of a huge hollow grinder, with an unpleasant long knife.

"It is true, Ricardo, that the red men do never approach the Owl Tower; but what is that? Some day our secret haunt will be surprised and the Yaquis will fall on us for profaning the old pile. Where is Ignazio? Where is the lieutenant, I say?"

Neither he nor his brother had arrived, that was the answer, to Mr. Gladsden's chagrin.

"Then will they get their boots choked with rain," remarked the commander of these precious rogues, comfortably installing himself at the fire, in the very manner which he had disapproved of in his men. There was a flash of lightning. The thunder roared round the tower, which bravely met the precursor shower, though it was of a drenching nature to justify the repugnance of the salteadors to standing sentinel in the open, whilst their luckier comrades enjoyed the shelter and the fire.

There was silence within the tower: the bandits, drawing a little aloof from their chief, in respect or lack of sympathy, prepared supper, priced their property with a view of staking it in card-play, or, as far as two or three were concerned, lounged at the door, watching the ground smoke after the wetting, and glancing tauntingly at their brothers on guard, who shone with moisture in the chance ray from the glorious fire.

The extreme heat around Gladsden, his fatigue and a dulness engendered by the recent strain on his faculties, forced his eyes to close now and then, and he was about falling into a torpor, when a commotion below aroused him.

A man, clanking his huge spurs to rid them of mud and rotten leaves, drenched almost through his blanket, splashed to the waist, his tough leather breeches scored by wait-a-bit thorns, swearing at the dog's weather, wringing out his hair, for he had lost his hat—this individual, hailed amicably as "our dear Ignazio," but heedless of the welcome in his vexation and a species of alarm, pushed aside his comrades flocking round him, and, saluting the captain, basking in the fire-beams, said reproachfully,

"My brother not here? Then ill fares him! There are strangers in the chaparral!"

"Strangers!" all the voices exclaimed, whilst weapons clattered their scabbards.

From only this transient glance at Don Ignazio, the Englishman made up his mind that he would not trust him with his life.

CHAPTER VII.

A WAKING NIGHTMARE.

"Aye, strangers, and no jokers! But to my tale. Captain, in the first place your Indian hireling has done his work well. He slew the Don—the youngster, I opine—and, as for the damsel, why I have had her on my arm this half-hour, till the storm forced me to *cache* her!"

"Aha! good!" said the captain, rubbing his hands on his nearly roasted knees. "Albeit, I am sorry that the girl escaped. I'd as lief marry the aunt to obtain the Miranda Hacienda, as wed the lass and be saddled with the old lady."

"Well, she's next to dead. The Apache worried them sore, so that they have had no food."

"And he? Did you *pay* him, as I suggested?"

"I followed him up to administer the dose of lead, but I was anticipated. Some strangers, I tell you, are roaming the desert, and blew a tunnel through his head."

"And Pepillo?" questioned Ricardo.

"Either lying perdu till the storm abates, or gratified with the same pill. It is a deuce of a heavy gun to carry a bullet so large and so true."

"An American rifle?" queried the captain, uneasily, whilst Gladsden, patting his gun silently, so conveyed to it the flattering fear with which its prowess had inspired the depredators.

"It is this way," went on Ignazio, who saw that all eyes were bent on him. "I struck the broad trail of the Don and the Apache. I heard a shot of an unknown piece, so I alighted, hoppled my mule, and, making a circuit, entered the thicket afoot, going slow because of my spurs.

"Soon I came to a sort of glade, where a big tree stump stands. There the Indian had sent an arrow through Don José, and there the unknown had sent a heavy bullet through him. All was quiet. No sign of the young man, their guide. But the senorita, the heiress, lay as one dead at the stump. I felt no pulse. Her eyes were closed. I took her up and made for my mule, but, either I had missed my mark or had strayed. No mule. Then, believing he would come here, since he has a sneaking affection for your horses, captain, I tried to carry the girl on my own way hither. She was light as a feather, but the thorns are a veritable net to catch humming-birds, and then, again, the storm about to break! faith, I hid her in a hollow tree, and hastened on. But I was overtaken by the rain, and am as tattered as a *lepero!*"

"And Pepillo?"

"He was never born to be drowned in the deluge upon us," answered Lieutenant Ignazio, with no superabundance of fraternal affection, as he sat at the fire, and overhauled the rent raiment. "We will fish for him and the girl, in the day."

"But if she was spent, she will die of starvation," remarked Matasiete, with a spark of humanity or of affection.

"Pshaw! as you say, you can, in the character of Don Annibal de Luna, marry the old lady and so obtain the property; besides, I left my flask of

aguardiente (fire-water, or whiskey) in her cold pit, and that's meat-and-drink eh, gentlemen?"

A silence ensued, the others having nodded a double tribute to his gallantry and the potency of raw spirits.

"I do not like the young man being out of your view," said Matasiete, who had a small, carping spirit, "If he should not meet Pepillo and Farruco——"

"Crawled off with an arrow in him to die in the bushes," was the reply. "That Apache is one of the poisoners, you know, and nothing that will not cure a rattlesnake bite, will subdue the venom of his wounds. A good riddance whoever perforated his skull! and here's his health," holding up a horn of spirits or high as though he divined the actual whereabouts of the avenger of Don Jose de Miranda.

"There is Farruco still to come in," said the captain, yawning.

"Pah! he's under a stone like an iguana! If he eludes the rain as cleverly as he does the leaden hail when we attack a caravan, methinks he will turn up in the day as dry as the core of a miser's heart."

Meanwhile, the storm, which had but inadequately manifested its power in the heralding blow and pour, now swept across the plain and buffeted the tower. It began to rock, and the sentries, who set discipline at defiance and had come into the shelter, were half afraid that they had not taken the wiser course. Whatever their terror below, that of Gladsden would have been more justifiable, for the loose stones atop were moved at each gust, and some fell both within and without. The prospect of the lightning-bolt flinging him scathed to the death, amid ruins, upon the knot of robbers, was quite within reasonable surmise.

He wrapped his gun up beside him, so that its steel should not attract the flame that seemed, when it played within his nook, to linger upon him and expected the worst between the two perils.

All at once, splitting the rolling thunder in its higher key, a frightened voice cried out, "The horses! there is a stampede!"

Notwithstanding the pouring rain, half-a-dozen of the bandits rushed out. But almost instantly returning, they gladly reported that the agitation among the horses was caused, not so much by their fright at the lightning, as by the mad gambols of Ignazio's mule, which, running into the group tethered on the leeward of the tower, was plying tooth and hoof in order to range himself near the horse to which he had taken one of those devoted fancies not uncommon among the hybrids. Instead of their forming a mass, rounded in shape, their tails outward, to meet the rain, they half encircled the tower, accommodating themselves to the wind, which was shifting to the south-east.

"The old tower holds firm," said Ignazio, his mouth full of beef, as he plied a needle and fine deer's sinew for thread in the reparation of his leggings.

"Only the gale shakes out a tooth of the old hag's head," said his neighbour on whom sundry fragments of the crumble had fallen.

"Ha!" ejaculated Don Matasiete, abruptly, as he clapped his long hand to his head, and then clutched the object which had struck him there, and then rolled into the ashes. He had pulled it forth with amazing alacrity. "Since when has this tower been built with cartridges?"

"What!" was the general cry, as all, like the speaker, looked upward.

"I tell you that this fell on my head. If it rains more of the like we must dash out the fire, or we'll be blown higher than the eagle flies!"

Every man had drawn a weapon. Their ignorance of meteorology might be great or little, but cartridges do not come with Mexican rain often enough to be calmly accepted without an inquisition.

"The strangers!" cried the captain, prudently backing towards the wall at the point furthest from the ladder's end. "Have they come in among us?"

"Stuff! what man in his lightness of heart would leap thus into the wolf's throat?"

"That's all very well put, Ricardo," rejoined the leader. "But they may have preceded you, and not known that this is our lair. Just climb up and see if, by any chance, we are receiving uninvited guests."

Ricardo, who was singled out, was a burly rogue, but he did not accept this order. On the contrary he made a wry face and thrust his cheek out with his tongue, which signified "go and do it yourself." This incipient mutiny was clearly contagious, for all the bandits returned their commander's interrogative look with another, defiant, stupid, or complacent, pursuant to their natures.

Any child could have drawn the inference that the quarter whence cartridges were showered might logically be expected to furnish a gun or two. The figurative language of the western man ranking a packet of lead and ball, or arrows, as the case varies of its being a white or a red man who sends the message, as an equivalent for a challenge to mortal combat—each bandit so interpreted the accident.

"Poltroons!" cried Matasiete, "is there room, save on the platform itself, for a troop of men? and would one man stand amid the lightning on this rocking tower top! I tell you, if there is a man there it will be in the nook where the ladder is suspended. One man! well, where are my brave fighting-cocks now?"

One man, armed with such a gun as that cartridge of unusual calibre promised, could very easily defend even that despicable nook against a whole coop of gamecocks. So the hesitation to climb the ladder rather augmented than diminished.

"Poltroons, eh?" observed Ignazio, to whom the incident perhaps came in harmony with some project of his own. "If it is nothing uncommon to go and see what owl has alighted in the tower top—an owl whose eggs are cartridges, by the way—why don't you show your superior courage? Show your hardly-too-often-distinguished daring, captain, by going up and wringing the neck of the fowl of evil omen yourself."

"G—go myself?" repeated Matasiete, whilst the robbers grinned more or less audibly.

"Yes, go yourself," returned the impudent lieutenant, "the more particularly as now that you have no impediment to seize the property of Don José de Miranda, you are going to marry richly and settle down as a farming gentleman, and will have no more opportunities of exhibiting your gallantry. Yes, go yourself! and, moreover, be quick about it, or the strangers, whoever they may be, may come down in impatience at your neglect of your duty of host and demand an account of your reluctant hospitality, face to beard, themselves."

Matasiete did not number that defect among his of the sanguine dog who perpetually lets go the substance to snap at the shadow. Whatever the brilliancy of the prospect of obtaining the estate of Miranda, at present that of losing the command of the salteadors was more at hand. Besides, best knowing what valuables were sewn up in the hem of his dress, or contained in his money-belt, in case, by robbers' law, judged a coward, and kicked out from their punctilious midst, stripped to the skin, this property would be lost to him, the captain made an effort.

"Then I will show you that I never set a command which I would not have executed myself!" spoken with a tremor, but loudly, to daunt the object aimed

at above. "I will mount, and not a cartridge, but the corpse of any one who has ventured to pry into our secrets, will shortly come hustling down among ye!"

He made one bound to the ladder, put his knife between his teeth, to prevent them chattering as much as to have the blade handy, and ascended briskly with his long legs at the start.

It would be unjust to say that Gladsden, who had heard all this scene, without caring to lean over and witness it lest the gleam of his eyes, reflecting the fire-rays, should betray him and draw a pistol-shot, was daunted by either the words of the redoubtable robber or his approach. Any one man, or two or three, come to that, caused him no apprehension, for he had all the advantages of position. But, after repulsing them, how could he hope to hold out a long time without food or drink?

An idea of subterfuge had struck him, which was only feasible to a seaman.

We observed that Matasiete had mounted the ladder briskly "at the start." It is true. But, when he had some twenty feet yet of the ascent to make, his action grew less commendable. He even framed an address, in appeal, to be uttered in a whisper only loud enough for the unknown occupant of the turret niche, full of promises or threats if he would only keep quiet, and allow the investigator to return uninjured and state there was an absence of ground for the alarm he had himself unfortunately originated.

In the meantime the Englishman, attributing the slowness of this up-comer's movement to his cowardice, believed he would be only too glad to find no occasion for his long stay at the top of the ladder.

So he thrust his head out of the gap before mentioned, and examined the metal arm socketed in the wall. It was not iron, but bronze, full three feet long to the hook, a little thicker than the thumb. It was planted solidly in a horizontal direction.

Without further reflection, hearing the respiration of Captain Matasiete, who had been goaded on by the whisperings ascending of his men beginning to criticise his halt, Gladsden noiselessly pushed his legs out, bent forward, seized the bronze bar with both hands with that grip which enables the sailor to defy the squall to dislodge him from the yard, and hung stiffly at arm's length over the void.

If the Mexican saw him in looking out of the window by one of the less frequent electrical flashes, he intended to kick him under the jaw, re-enter, convert the body into a rampart, and fight whilst there was a shot in the barrel, or till he had a chance to claim Ignazio's safeguard. The lieutenant could but be grateful to a man who removed his superior in his favour, and, moreover, brought him a fortune.

He had no more than assumed this trying position, being drenched to the skin at the very first instant of exposure, before Matasiete at last, with many misgivings pulling at his toes, lifted his head above the flooring, and, with indescribable joy, saw there was no one there.

"Well, captain?" was the half-ironical inquiry from below.

"There is no one, you asses!" was the polite reply, in a gleeful tone.

Gladsden sighed in relief as deep as the captain's.

"Stand from under!" added the latter, putting his knife in its sheath. "I am coming down."

The Englishman was saved!

He prepared to return within his nook. The imminent danger was over. The rain was unpleasant, and the uneasiness of horses beneath him, which he heard whinnying as if they scented him, as was probable, offered the chance of

exciting the curiosity of a Mexican, who would infallibly descry him if he looked up outside. So he wished to cut short the feeling of fatigue which already attacked his wrists and shoulders. But, at the first movement, what he believed a mere fancy was confirmed as fact: the bar was set with an unalterable firmness which spoke volumes for the mason of old, but the metal, in which too much copper had been alloyed, or deteriorated by the weather, was slowly bending, arching over the abyss!

No time was there to spare. He began by shifting his grip, moving one hand inwards and bringing the outer up to it, to overcome the curve in the rod. He looked to the socket to make sure that it still held, when his anxious eyes met another pair in the very gap. They were the Mexican robber's!

Matasiete had smelt the powder, at least, he had, in a final and idle sweeping round of the visual ray, perceived the gun of the Englishman, which he had, nevertheless, concealed with unusual and creditable care in the angle of floor and wall.

Now, Matasiete placidly leaning on the sill of the window, so to call it, fixed his ferocious eyes on Gladsden, gleaming with delight at having so complete a chance to avenge on another his companions' taunts of cowardice.

"The owl!" he said ironically.

"You devil!" returned Gladsden, in English, for in such critical moments a man does not display his linguistical acquirements.

Devil, indeed! Matasiete drew his knife and slowly leaned outward in order to slash the poor wretch's fingers to anticipate their relaxing the grasp on the over-drooping bar.

The other made an offer to let go with one hand in the hope to get at a pistol to blow out the fiend's brains at a snap-shot, but the impossibility of the feat was immediately so impressed upon him, that he grasped with a double hold once more in deeper desperation.

"Oh! any death but this waking nightmare!" he ejaculated, as a kind of prayer.

Before his fingers should be pinched by his own weight, between the metal and the brickwork, he thought, by a final spurt of strength, to leap up and seize the grinning demon.

"No, you don't!" cried the captain, guessing his aim, and leaning well out over him, gleaming steel in hand, "thou shalt die like a dog."

He lifted his arm to strike. Gladsden shuddered in his anguish—his grasp did not relax, rather was it cramped, but he was thrust by his body coming sidewise to the wall, from that direction, and slid thus perforce to the end of the bar downwards. He closed his eyes not to see the knife and fiendish eyes, not to hear the devilish laugh, when a sharp shot resounded below, a bullet shrieked beside his tingling ear, and louder than the cry which the feeling of falling through space wrung from the brave man, seemed the shriek of Captain Matasiete, "creased" through the prominent nose.

Gladsden descended, like a rock loosened from a sierra summit, upon the plain below. Instead of the solid earth, however, he fell upon a warm yielding substance—the backs of a couple of horses. Clutching the mane of one at random—not the one on which he had landed, and of which he all but broke the back and so left paralysed—he was instantly carried away by the frightened steed.

Behind him, as he was borne helter-skelter over the prairie, converted into a shallow lake, he heard the clamour of the Mexicans startled by the shot, and later by a stampede in reality of their horses. It seemed to him, stunned in a measure though he was, that in the thick of the swarm of quadrupeds madly in

flight like his own, but in another direction, there was a figure, black and bowing its head between its steed's ears, with a white object across the saddle-bow.

But it was a mere glimpse! a new Mazeppa, he went careering on an unchained thunderbolt over the prairie, whilst the old Tower quivered in a fresh onset of the tempest.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE "LITTLE JOKER."

THERE rode a charming little sailing vessel in Guaymas Port. It flew the Chilian flag, was about a hundred and twenty tons register, and was named *La Burlonilla*, or "Little Joker," which might be interpreted innocently, or as a tacit allusion to the pea used in "thimblerig." She was so coquettish, so fine of run, so light and buoyant, and yet carried a good spread of sail, that the experienced Gladsden reckoned she would do her twelve knots an hour without shipping enough water to drown the purser's cat. But there seemed to be some mystery attending the ownership. The shipkeeper allowed no one to inspect her closely, far less to board her, even threatening our Englishman with a blunderbuss. He heard at the Heaven-and-Liberty Tavern that she was consigned to Don Stefano Garcia, kinsman of the General Garcia, mixed up with the intrigues of Santa Anna, a rich merchant-banker, and hide dealer. It was easy to make his acquintance by constituting him his banker, for a remittance of a goodly amount which came on, *viâ* New York and Mexico, just when he most wanted funds to enable him to ascertain what truth dwelt in Pepillo's story.

Besides, as an old resident of Sonora, he was just the man to help him to find the relict of the *bandolero* of Captain Matasiete, though the reason for this search he took care not to impart to Senyor Garcia.

With an affability which was even noticeably extreme, Don Stefano accepted the double trust, and begged his new client to come out to his villa soon and dine with him—a pleasant habitude with bankers all the world over.

Gladsden accepted the invitation. During the dinner—not bad for the place—the guest learnt that the goleta commanded a fancy price, say, twenty thousand dollars, and then would only be sold—not hired—if the owner, a capricious Chilian, rejoicing in the numerous and sonorous appellatives of Don Annibal Cristoval de Luna y Almagro de Cortes, had not changed his intention of living upland on an estate which would shortly become his through a marital alliance.

After the repast, five or six friends of the host came in, and among them the bearer of the long titles, just taxing our pen again.

In token of pretensions to be regarded as an unofficial, but all the more important representative of Chili, this dignitary wore a rich costume trimmed with gold, an immense cocked hat, after the style borne by Nelson's enemies who were admirals at Trafalgar, bullion epaulettes that covered his upper

arms, high boots coming up over the knee, not to mention a colossal sabre. Under this accoutrement, nevertheless, Gladsden thought no stranger was displayed; and, in fact, before he spoke, he recognised the individual who had grinned at him, like Quasimodo at Claude Frollo, dangling from the cathedral turret, out of the gap-like window of the Indian tower. The master of the *Little Joker*, the Chilian agent, was the captain of the Upper Sonora ravagers—Matasiete himself. The crease across his nose was an additional token.

Spite of his emotion, the Englishman hoped he had not betrayed the act of quick identification, all the more as Don Annibal, etc., making no sign of recognition, turned to chatting with the others without paying the foreigner any more heed. From a glance which he intercepted between the banker and the pretended Chilian, Gladsden was soon of the impression that there was a complete understanding there. He even jumped to the conclusion that the stranger in the Heaven-and-Liberty Tavern had been instructed to volunteer the hint that had caused our ever-imprudent Briton to form acquaintance with the robber's banker.

"They are a deeper set than I imagined," thought he. "The rogue is a pirate on land and sea. When there is no revolution in Mexico, and the authorities attend a little to police matters, our salteador takes a summersault aboard his dainty craft, and goes slaving, pirating, or, at the least, pearl-fishing. If these guests are out of the same cask, by George! I am going to pass a pleasant evening!"

But there arose no question of the sale of the *Burlonilla*, or of anything connected with business. That was put off till the morrow, after the Spanish-American custom.

But there did come up a topic of general interest—gaming. The American-Hispaniolans are inveterate gamblers; it is their dominant passion. After having chatted and drank, amid the consumption of innumerable cigars, someone proposed a *monté*, a suggestion thrown out only to be caught at a bound with enthusiasm.

Other friends of Don Stefano had dropped in, so that the Englishman found more than a corporal's guard arrayed against him. The collection now was composed of upwards of a score.

A table happened to have the orthodox green cloth upon it, where the social "tiger" is prone to roam: new cards, sealed, of course, were brought in, and the sport began.

Without being positively a player, Mr. Gladsden had the blood in his veins of his grandfather, who was a noted card player, a contemporary of Fox and Selwyn. Besides, he understood that he might offend if he stood aloof.

The stakes were, at the outset, moderate, but gradually swelling, they soon attained staggering proportions, some of the points running up to a hundred and even a hundred and fifty *ounces*. The consequence was that in less than a couple of hours almost all the tilters were cleaned out, and had to become mere lookers-on. At midnight chance—if it were chance—arranged it that only two players were facing each other: Don Annibal of the Cortes Family, as he called himself at present, and Mr. Gladsden. The gallery, as the surrounding bystanders of a game are styled, cooped the pair in so that the European could not easily have withdrawn. All the time the master of the goleta had been a loser, and the Englishman having been luck-favoured, was on the contrary supplied with considerable funds, which elicited many a covetous glance.

"Why!" ejaculated the pretended Chilian, with admirably feigned surprise, "we two are left facing one another."

"So we are!" returned Mr. Gladsden, thinking, with all the possible mischances, he was more agreeably placed here *vis-à-vis* with the gentleman of the night, than clinging on a bar outside the top of a tower fifty feet high.

"Shall we two go it alone, captain?"

"I was just going to ask the favour, captain."

The other "captain" nodded and grinned under his long hook nose, to the banker and others at hand, as much as to say, "Now I have my gentleman precisely in the corner I have been driving him to."

It was the Englishman's turn to cut.

"How's the play?" he inquired.

"Will you venture all?" the highwayman leader returned in a mocking way.

"Why should I not? you have so far afforded me so much hearty entertainment that I am entirely at your disposal."

Don Annibal made a grimace not unlike that when the marvellous shot had allowed the last speaker to drop out of the swing of his *navaja*.

"Even in case I risk the whole heap?" resumed Matasiete, laying his long fingers out on the pillar of gold coin before him.

"As your lordship desires, though it is a mistake."

"How so?"

"Because I am in luck's way lately," returned Mr. Gladsden, significantly. "You always lose pitted against me."

"Do you really think that run will last?"

"I am willing to wager on it," was the reply, in the determined tone of an Englishman to whom, indeed, a bet is the *ultima ratio*.

"*Caray!*" exclaimed the arch-bandit, piqued, "your remark decides me, all goes on the *dos de espadas*, two of spades. Is it a go?"

The Spanish-Americans are fine players, they lose or gain ever so large sums without wincing. As the spectators uttered a cry of admiration for him who was more or less their lion, Gladsden resolved to prove that he could gamble as well as the best of them.

"Senyor Don Annibal, you'll excuse the rest," he said, impudently, like a man who pretty well knew that he had not a friend in the crowd, as he presented his adversary, in all senses of the word, with the cards; "do you mind shuffling them yourself?"

"What for, senyor?" holding his hands away.

"Oh, it is not merely because I believe you *good at shuffling*, but because things are getting serious, and it is important after all that has taken place between us that you should be convinced that I play fair, and that nothing but my better fortune thwarts you."

Don Stefano turned pale; several of the guests whispered to one another, probably seeing that twenty to one on a ground of their own choosing was rather contrary to the character of a blue-blooded caballero. One of them even lifted up his voice, saying:

"He acts like a perfect gentleman."

Gladsden bowed to him, though he fully believed he recognised in him the suggester on a memorable occasion that the author of the death of the late Pepillo Santa Maria should be roasted alive.

Captain de Luna also bowed, but to his opponent, took the cards, shuffled them, and presented them with grace. Gladsden laid the cards on the board, and turning to no one in particular, said:

"Do me the honour to cut them, senyor."

Some one obeyed the request, and the English player began to deal. A death-like stillness reigned at once as by enchantment in the drawing-room so

well peopled. Spite of their villainy, the spectators of the coolness of the Englishman alone in the tiger's lair were impressed by it in his favour, and, though the most of them, such as appertained directly to Matasiete's band, at least, would have fallen on him without reluctance on the road back to Guaymas, here they registered a vow to let him have a good show of fun for his money without interference.

Don Annibal had staked on the two of spades; the other sought to produce the five of clubs (*cinco de Bastos*) to win; in other words, that card ought to come out of the pack to him before his adversary received the one he called to appear. But after quite twenty of the parallelograms of pasteboard had been thrown on the table one after another, neither of the two cards designated had appeared; but everyone felt they were on the nick.

At the moment when Gladsden was about to show the face of a card between his fingers, the captain of banditti, and of the so-called Chilian cutter, checked his action, saying—

"Stay half-a-minute, please."

"What's your pleasure?"

"Perhaps to give you one. Did not I hear Don Stefano say something about your looking out to buy a pleasure vessel?"

"I even thought that I might make a yacht of——"

"Of the goleta in the port, of the *Burlonilla*—of my vessel?"

"There is no other worth a biscuit, certainly! Why the question now?" inquired the European with some surprise.

"I tell you what; if you will consent, I will add the *Little Joker*, all standing, to my pile, against twenty-five thousand dollars. What do you say to that proposition?"

CHAPTER IX.

THE WAYLAYERS.

"WHAT do I say to that offer?" returned Gladsden; "that it is a queer one, not to say a mad one! Senyor, I am morally certain that you would lose your ship."

"You mean, you refuse," triumphantly, whilst the auditors smiled flatteringly on their leader for having "bluffed" the foreigner.

"Oh, no, since you insist on it," replied the latter, coldly, though he felt his heart contract within him; "but since I have set out to show I can play cards, I'll sell you the present turn up for ten thousand!"

"Don't! don't do anything of the sort!" interrupted the host, turning pale. "I'll give you fifteen thousand for it myself!"

"Thank you; but now, since an outsider has intervened, I must stick to it myself."

"You are very right," remarked Captain Matasiete, with a scowl and an angry glance at the banker; "for it is the right one."

Gladsden had tossed the card down without looking at it.

"Cinco de Basto!" exclaimed all the lookers-on in the one voice. "Prodigious! What a splendid game!"

"You were right, right along, about your luck—*at cards!*" observed Don Annibal, with the most genial smile he could beam with. "The *Little Joker* is yours."

Gladsden had truly won, for there was the requisite card before him. He had been inwardly persuaded when he vaunted so boldly that he was bound to lose, and had only accepted his mortal enemy's challenge out of recklessness. The emotion he experienced in payment of his false glory was so deep for a couple of moments that he was like one stunned, and stared, still, with no possibility to get out a word.

In that brief interval the banker had conferred with the bandit-gambler, and to some purpose, moreover, for the latter loudly set to felicitating the Englishman on his continued good fortune; and, as at the end of his speech Don Stefano put before him the corner of a sheet of paper, on which he had hastily written some lines, he went on to say:

"Gaming debts must be settled in four-and-twenty hours. Here is the transfer of my property in the Chilian goleta, the *Little Joker*, as she floats at this moment, with all she holds, in consideration of the sum of twenty-five thousand dollars, which I hereby acknowledge, before all this honourable company, to have received!"

As Gladsden, from the tone and the railing glances of more than one hearer of this pretty little presentation speech, conceived no doubt whatever that he would never be let set foot on the deck of the *Burlonilla*, even if he reached Guaymas intact, he made no to-do about accepting the paper, and merely faltered a simple remonstrance at what he had said being taken too seriously.

"Oh, don't be scrupulous," said Don Stefano, with a kind of pride in his friend, "the sum which our Chilian gentleman has lost against you, though apparently no joking matter, is nothing to him in reality. I know something of his pecuniary standing, and I assure you, if he will pardon the breach of banking confidence, that Don Annibal Cristoval de Luna y Almagro y Pizarro de Cortes has not suffered the least injury in purse!"

He hardly had the title pat himself, but nobody noticed the error, or cared to correct it.

It was, perhaps, pardonable in the loser, after all the fine words, to be glum, but a mournfulness infested the entire assembly, and the few gentlemen whom Gladsden charitably looked upon as innocent neighbours, merchants, or planters, oozed away gradually. Then the remainder, in more probability the allies or sworn adherents of the salteador leader, went forth in a mass.

The banker offered to house the English guest till morning, and he pretended to accept the offer, which had the result of precipitating the farewell of Don Annibal, *alias* Matasiete. Thereupon, alone with Don Stefano, the Englishman refused a nightcap of French brandy, and as his servant, a man engaged at Guaymas, had entered to receive his orders for the night, he seemed suddenly to have gone right round to the other point of the compass, and said resolutely,

"Ruben, we are going at once back to town. While I come down and wait at the gate, bring the mules!"

Don Stefano began a courteous remonstrance, but the Englishman, after having stood undaunted among a score of bandits, was not going to be prevailed on by one single opponent. So he smiled knowingly, and replied,

"I never sleep in the house of a friend, or in a strange bed. I have

infallibly the nightmare—one of those bad sleeps, my dear banker, when a man fires off his revolver, and lays about him with the leg of a table so as to inflict damages that would make your quickest accountant sit up overnight to reckon. You had better let me go."

Don Stefano still mumbled something.

"Perhaps I shall overtake our dear Don Annibal on the road, and if we do meet the chances are that the time will be short for the rest of the way to him, for I want to make myself very agreeable to your honourable friend."

There was a mighty muster of servants, though it was better than three in the morning, at the door, and Gladsden who saw that the two mules were coming round in the courtyard, in charge of his faithful man, seriously contemplated seizing Don Stefano by the collar and holding him as as a buckler, whilst he cowed the domestics with his revolver and rushed for the saddle. But his host made no sign, and so the Englishman mounted and rode out into the road without any bar.

He reasoned, therefore, that he would be attacked on the highway by the bandits on their return to cut his throat in the villa, since Don Stefano's servitors were above the business.

Hence he was rather relieved than startled, about an hour before sunrise, when he heard a couple of gunshots not far ahead of him and his man. The latter was so frightened, or so much of an accomplice in the ambush, that he belabored his mule, turned and vanished in the darkness, increasing his speed with a shout of terror as there rushed after him a horseman who had just passed Gladsden with the dizzy rapidity of a meteor, screaming, "*Muerte, hombre*—murder ahead man!"

Pretty well on the alert, and his eyes quite accustomed to the darkness, to say nothing of the night breeze off the sea having blown away the last trace of the long stay in the heated room, Gladsden divined that the fugitive had been mistaken for himself, and had been fired upon by his own chosen assassins.

There was a clump of trees ahead, from around which the fleeing cavalier had come. On the instant, Gladsden imagined a trick. He flung himself off his mule, to whose flank he applied a stroke of his whip, which started it off not leisurely, and lay down, half across the road. He had his revolver ready in his hand. There was a yellow stripe in his riding cloak, which made him tolerably distinguishable in the gloom.

Waylayers have good eyes. Two men, advancing on foot, speedily spied this stumbling-block, and were so flattered by that evidence, as they conceived it, to the goodness of their aim, that they forbore to delay to re-charge their guns which they carried easily "at the trail." One of them was more eager than the other to examine the prey, and threw himself before the second. Gladsden judged this an excellent opportunity to kill two birds with one bullet, on the expectation of the missile perforating the foremost and then burying itself in his comrade. He waited only long enough to see his teeth gleaming in a savage and gleeful smile, and pulled the trigger.

The robber uttered a scream of pain and surprise, and fell back upon his mate, who instinctively pushed him aside, so that he measured his length in the deep water-cart furrows. The other, paralysed with fear, was not at all disenchanted by seeing the supposed victim of their double shots rise and present the revolver of which one chamber had furnished a quietus to his friend, whilst he said. having seen the man's face in the flash—

"Good morning, Master Ignazio, otherwise the lieutenant of our dear acquaintance, Don String of names, chief of the bandoleros, and skipper of the *Little Joker*. If you will just give me the address of your sister, so that I can

deliver your last dying message, and that of your dear brother, Pepillo, I shall require nothing further before I rid me of your company!"

Ignazio gave a howl of rage which exemplified the reason for his nickname of "the Mountain Cat," at facing the avowed witness of his brother's decease, the probable slayer, but the revolver daunted him, and the allusion to his sister riveted him to the spot, so that he did not budge, even so much as an eye, to look at his companion who gave a last groan in the rut.

As Mr. Gladsden had no notion of ever again bestowing so much of his time on this nocturnal cavalier, he now designed to inform him about the inheritance of his *brother bandit*. With a quick transition of feeling, the hearer ejaculated a prayer, luckily short, and springing on the speaker dragged him into the thicket at the roadside.

"Oh, gentleman!" he cried, "you must not be seen by the others. They line the road to the town. You will surely be killed even running the gauntlet, though we believed you would be stifled in your own bedroom at Don Stefanos, but you shall not be harmed now! I swear it!" he added vehemently. "You are under the charge of the Saints; your escape from our bullets showed that!"

Gladsden did not trouble just then to undeceive him in his conceit about the horseman who had drawn the fire of the ambuscade.

"Come! you are not so bad a fellow, I grant!"

"And you are a brave heart, senyor. I watched you close while you played the captain disguised."

"Oh, were you there? Now well, I won't say fraternal love would make you help me, but there is a prospect of a bushel of pearls, for your sister, the orphans, and yourself, and, in faith—as you would say—I honestly believe you had better be my safe guide to the port! What say you?"

"It's a bargain, senyor. Besides——" (here he could not help laughing heartily, though in a low tone) "with me you can trick that humbug, the captain, lovely!"

"In what way! Will he not burst with vexation if I slip past his dogs unhurt?"

"He will with disappointment when you sail away in the *Burlonilla*."

"I believe that."

"And that you may do, with my help, if we are on the alert! I am the chief officer of that barque."

"Which is no more Chilian than you are an honest man."

"Pardon me, senyor! I am honest on occasion, and I will deliver you up the ship if I may still retain my post aboard."

"It strikes me, man, that it is you who are making conditions."

But the Englishman, who realised all the danger of his situation, had not used an angry tone. The bold and merry rogue accordingly proceeded.

"Caramba! what is there strange in that? I save your life; you safeguard my neck! Besides, on land, here, I am not afraid of our judges; but on the sea, if the American naval officers catch us, I have always counted it as certain that I should hang!"

"I am with you there!"

"Let me go with you, there, senyor! I will not only pilot you to the town, but do so on the cutter, and take you to the pearl-store, surely, steadfastly, under your honour's direction!"

"Your cool impudence is much to my taste. See, day is peeping. Lead on! and if we reach the town without having to burn powder or take the edge off a knife, you have excellent hopes of being my lieutenant on the cocky little craft."

"She's a beauty! But, silence! they come, and will tread on poor Ricardo; so, away!"

CHAPTER X.

THE PEARL-DIVER'S PRICE.

However placid our adventurous Englishman might seem to be, he was a man, like another, to be dazzled by the play of his fancy, rendering almost palpable to his mind all the jewelled dreams of *The Arabian Nights*, where pearls and other sea gems play so brilliant a part, and are measured out in bushels by the heroes of those prodigious tales.

Now that he owned a fleet vessel, nothing seemed easier than to realise all these visions, and to succeed in obtaining the treasure indicated by Pepillo, so that, like another Aladdin, his fortune would enable him to eclipse even the dons of the European stock exchanges.

The first thing had been to obtain indisputable command of the ship. So he went to the port governor, a military man, who was incorruptible, and would, he could see, stand no nonsense from the robber-chief and his more or less public allies: Colonel Fontoro stamped the transfer-paper of the late owner of the *Burlonilla*, and authorised Captain Gladsden to defend his property against all illegal claimants.

There were a score of American or English sailors knocking about at the port. Gladsden selected eight, added a North American negro as a colour line, a Chinaman for cook, a Kanack to help in the diving, and a Valparaisan boy for the cabin. Ignazio he allowed to be his lieutenant "on trial," but protected himself by giving the second mate, Jem Holdfast, a Bristol man, a sealed order to take command in event of his absence for twenty-four hours without notice, or the American acting suspiciously.

There was a lack of the most important desideratum in his peculiar quest, pearl-divers; Ignazio did not pretend to be expert, like his brother-in-law had been, spite of over-much assurance in most pretensions, and the Kanack was doubtful.

As those waters were wont to have furnished a bountiful harvest of pearls to Spain—up to 1530 from the conquest, a million of dollars worth had been sent home officially, heaven only knowing what supplement the tyrants had smuggled to the Jews of Barcelona, Cadiz, Lisbon, and Oporto—Gladsden cherished the hope that he would pick up some Indian, versed by innate inheritance, skilful and strong, if not any too honest. Though the pearl-fishery on the West Coast was practically exhausted in the seventeenth century, still a few essay it "for their own hand." It is not impossible that notable pearls are still picked up, and secretly disposed of, as only the other day (1883, to be exact) one was found in the Bay of Panama, so large as to rank among the few celebrated gems of historical note.

The search for a diver was fruitless to Gladsden. The Indians, no doubt, scented a little coolie-catching in the wind, where so rakish a vessel was concerned, and had no inclination to be carried to Ceylon and set to work at coffee planting during an engagement of 99 years.

Besides, with so ugly an enemy, the captain of *bandleros* hatching a scheme to recover his property, with which Don Jorge Federico was more and more delighted, so that he wondered it had ever been valued at only twenty thousand dollars, he ought already to have sailed. He determined to weigh, therefore, spite of his unsupplied want, obeying the rude alternative.

On the eve, while the men were putting the finishing touches to the sea-going trim, while Captain Gladsden was in the cabin, lolling back in a Windsor (Connecticut) chair, smoking and seeing Gladsden Hall rising in a vast estate of new purchase like Chatsworth itself, the South American page came to the doorsill, and announced the arrival alongside of a strange gentleman, with the last provisions of fresh vegetables and water.

Gladsden was in no good humour at the interruption, especially as he conjectured that the new comer was an emissary of the ex-skipper of the pretty cotter. He was, therefore, about to rejoin that the cabin boy and the uninvited caller might go to Hades in company, when the party mentioned, probably of an impatient temperament, or too pressed by the urgency of his case to stand on ceremony, caught the boy by the waist-belt, tossed him aside, and, leaping into the cabin, said as easily as one could imagine and with a winning smile:—

"Be good enough to overlook the manner of my arrival, sir captain, but I *must* speak with you."

Without any invitation he sat himself down on a locker, and pulling out tobacco and paper from his sash at the waist, proceeded to roll up a cigarette.

Rather taken aback by this abrupt intrusion, the Englishman took a long stare at the speaker, who did not show in the least that the attention was burdensome. Then he smiled, with a reflection which he did not care just then to express. When the cigarette was made and lit, the stranger, half hiding his handsome young face in a cloud of smoke, leant towards his compulsory host with a somewhat mocking air, and began:—

"Senyor capitano, I am of the opinion that, though you should reckon me up by the hour together in the comprehensive style you are doing, that would in no way enlighten you as to who I am."

"That is just where you are out, my friend," returned Gladsden, with some triumph. "It is I who know more about you than you do of me, or rather it is you who are more in my debt than ever I hope I shall be in yours."

It was the turn for the young Mexican to evince surprise, but he bore the shock very well.

"There is an error, sir," he responded, after reflecting, whilst he regarded the frank, hardy features over against him, repaying his mocking air with a derisive expression which was full of fun, though. "I have never seen you before."

"That is true, perhaps. At the time when we were face to face there was the ugly head of a red Indian thrust between, a head, by the way, in which I lodged a bullet, thanks to which your hair remains on yours."

"Oh!" exclaimed Benito Bustamente, in a gush of joy and amazement. "Was it you whose shot rang in my ear like the voice of a delivering archangel when that murderous savage's knife was hovering over my heart in order to precipitate the death which his envenomed darts had failed to inflict? How can I thank you?"

He sprang forward, let the cigar fly from his fine teeth, and seizing the Englishman's hand, carried it effusively to his lips.

"Well, there, have done, do stop it, my good fellow!" said the other, embarrassed, "I am heartily glad I saved the life of so graceful a caballero, and more, I cannot say now, particularly, if your present errand has anything to do with the occurrence which culminated in placing you, mighty pale and 'gone' looking, at the mercy of that scalping fiend."

"Something to do with it? all, all!" cried Benito.

They exchanged stories. When the Mexican explained how his despair had

goaded him into taking up the trail of Dolores, though ill-fitted to combat a horde of ruffians, the Englishman stayed him.

"I was on the same track," said he, "how singular! we might have fallen foul of one another, and had a pretty mincing and slashing duet in the thicket, that stormy night. Well, such a fatal blunder was not in the books."

"Thank heaven! To proceed," went on Benito; "I found Dolores sheltered from the rain in a hollow tree. She was like the dead, speechless, inflexible, cold; but fortunately I carried the means of resuscitating her. When she had been so revivified, I left her to await my return with the steed I proposed stealing from a frightened herd which could be seen by the lightning glare around the base of that Mound Tower. The robbers were within the pile, I could move bodily; to my amazement, I spied, on looking up, a man suspended as by a thread from the top of the cylinder of brick. There, in another part, I recognised another visage, hideous, demoniacally grinning, hovering over this doomed wretch. A knife soon glittered in the hand of the cruel scoundrel. I knew the peculiar profile, the thin lips, the chin and hook-nose nearly meeting. It was Don Annibal Cristoval de Luna, as he called himself, the visitor at Don Jose's, suspected then to be affiliated to the salteador. I hesitated not a moment, I could not stay your fall, senyor, but I was bound to revenge it, I fired with the untried gun, which handsomely did its work, and the scream of Don Annibal, whose beauty I had marred, was my reward and an alarm to his gang. But I had time to select a horse, stampede the others, gallop to Dolores' refuge, place her on the saddle-bow, and flee round the terrified animals over the prairie. When our flight became slower by fatigue, I lassoed a second horse for Dolores, and we two rode easily on to Guaymas."

"Whilst I was carried away, heaven knows how far, luckily I fell in with a couple of decent fellows, professional protectors of the cattle from vermin, and they conducted me to the post, also whither they were bearing their pelts. What a strange meeting! So your idea of humanity was to shoot close to the ear of a man suspended fifty feet on high, so as to startle him into the drop!" laughing. "Well, shake hands again," continued Gladsden, extending his hand.

"But you are alive?"

"I agree with you there. But if I had not fallen on something so soft as a couple of horses, one of which obligingly bolted and took me out of the robbers' camp, I should have been a pancake. All this thanks to your *humanity!*"

Benito hardly understood this kind of jesting; but the ways of the Anglo-Saxon are often incomprehensible to the Southern American, and he did not stop to require an elucidation.

"We are quits, then; that is manifest!" said he.

"Which means we are both, with the very natural proneness of each man, to overrate his vital value infinitely, under ceaseless obligation to one another. What can I do for you?"

"Captain, you have been beating up Guaymas for a pearl-fisher—a diver of the rare old sort, who could go deeper and stay under longer than the degenerate descendants of that almost forgotten man-fish Miguelillo, of Tehuantepec, who, in 1620 or so, dived an incredible number of fathoms, and brought up the 'Queen of the Gulf,' which precious pearl, worthy of being called a 'Cleopatrina,' and dissolved in an Imperator's cup, was, up to a few years ago the largest gem in the coronet of Our Lady in Saragossa Cathedral!"

"My learned friend, I want a diver, indeed. Only I mean to fish in bulk that is, draw up at one scoop a mass of pearls!"

"Did you never hear the men about the port mention one Benito Vasquez, of the Upper Gulf?" went on the Mexican, without reference to this announcement.

"Well, several did say that the person you name was the very man I was feeling for. But no one had seen him for some time back."

"Benito Vasquez is Benito de Bustamente! Fond of the seas, acquainted with an old Indian, one of the many who assert a descent from the early kings, I know almost every inch of water, far below the surface, too, from the mouth of the Gila to Cape Palmo. I am that diver!"

"Famous diver," said Gladsden. "My dear fellow, you will make my expedition a short and surely successful one. You are the very man I want. I won't say now, engage with me at a sum; but come, point out the spot I seek, help me to drag up the sunken treasure, and as I live, I shall turn my head whilst you dip with your cap into the chest."

"Are you speaking seriously, captain?" demanded Benito, not surprised at the sudden friendship he had excited, that not being an unexampled event.

"Most seriously."

"Then our bargain is made. The conditions lie thus: ask me whatsoever you will, my Englishman, and I will do my best to gratify it. On your part, let me be accompanied on the voyage by my wife, Donna Dolores de Miranda."

"Is that all! Delighted to turn myself out of my cabin for the young lady."

"Afterwards you will land me and her where I indicate."

"Right, but about your remuneration?"

"Not a seed of a pearl. I shall consider myself sufficiently rewarded if you loyally keep this arrangement, on which depends the happiness of all my life."

"Senyor Benito Vasquez de Bustamente," said Gladsden, rising and gravely holding out his hand. "I read in some old newspaper which beguiled the dreary watch, that your father, in resigning the Presidency of these Mexican States, said: He retired with nothing but his family, whom he would rear to be like himself, content with the grand but simple ambition to be *good Mexicans*. You are worthy your father, who must have been a fine gentleman! and I tell you, one such Mexican suffices to make me reckon very little in the opposing balance a thousand mongrels like that Don Annibal, the robber chief, and his citizen allies. Bring the young lady aboard—she shall be the Queen of the Sea here, my very sister!"

"By my soul!" cried the young Mexican: "you have a gallant heart, and I anticipated little less from a seaman and an Englishman! So, the lady is alongside at this very moment, in the dugout that I paddled out in, awaiting the result of my pleading."

"Enough, the young lady shall have a state-room, and even a sitting-room apart, for the carpenter can soon knock up a partition here. No one but you and I, if I may be considered a guest now and then, may enter there, and I never without you. It is needless to say that Madam Bustamente shall be treated on my ship with all the respectful consideration which is her due."

"Then the sooner we are off soundings the better. Both of us have active enemies ashore."

"Not while my flag covers you. The fiery flag of England is one that grasping fingers have been burnt again afore now, senyor. Now let's bless the ship with the presence within her bulwarks of your life companion, let's have her here."

Benito shook the generous foreigner's hand cordially, ran up the companion-way and vanished for a short moment, after which he returned, preceding Dolores. She had even sooner and more completely than her young mate recovered from the privations of the desert, and grief at the loss of her only parent. Her beauty was exhilarating, and Gladsden was really enchanted at her

salutation, so fraught with modesty and grace. Her soft, harmonious voice fluttered faintly in her answer to his welcoming address, but she was soon encouraged to the top of her heart, and even laughed at having been fearful up to then.

To think they were in some sort old friends ; that this indolent captain had been on the trail of her abductor, and had besides visited with condign punishment the assassin of her father. It was as good as her brightest dreams.

CHAPTER XI.

THE TWO CAPTAINS OF THE "GOLETA."

WHILST Senyora Bustamente was formally taking some refreshment, Gladsden summoned Ignazio.

"Lieutenant," said he, sternly, "it is a honour for me to have Madam Vasquez, the bride of Benito Vasquez, the pearl-diver, to present to you."

Ignazio bowed, and darted from his widely-distended eyes an enormous show of admiration at the young Mexican.

"The famous pearl-fisher," murmured he ; "the take will be rare and splendid now."

"This lady," continued the master, "is our passenger, you are answerable for her being treated with the utmost deference, and the greatest attention by all the crew. We'll fashion a cabin for her hereabouts, All the men are forbidden to enter here under any pretence whatever. Do'ye hear, Master Ignazio ? "

"Yes."

"Then what the mischief are you staring for ?"

"Ha, Senyora Vasquez ?" he repeated. "Surely I behold with admiration-dazed eyes the incomparable daughter of the martial haciendero, Don José de Miranda."

"Eh ! how now, what do you know of the lady ?"

"Only that she was the chosen bride of his excellency, Don Annibal Cristoval."

"Eh ? why, of course !"

"And that illustrious scoundrel," went on the late lieutenant of banditti, with a refreshing air of morality, "after having had the poor don tracked to his death by the venomous Apache, to whom I owe my brother's loss—one to him ! a thousand devils pull at him—the captain not my lamented Pepillo—after all that show of hatred to him who took the lady out of his clutches, Don Annibal will not allow the double removal unimpeded, I'll wager you a thousand ounces against one poor, old, worn dollar, of the senyorita and his dear *Burlonilla*."

"Indeed ! we'll see about that."

The speaker marked a curious mixture of fear and doubt flit across the visage of Ignazio.

Benito, seeing that he was only in the way of his young wife's settling down

in her new home, and having some neglected preparations to make ashore, proposed a hasty return thither.

The captain all the less reluctantly coincided with his expressed intention, as he had a confidential message to transmit to the British vice-consul—a young Jewish gentleman on whom he believed he could rely in such an emergency as impended.

In Benito's absence, Captain Gladsden took further precautions. Disliking a budding smile on the phiz of Ignazio, he ordered him below, placing Bristol Jem at the head of affairs in his stead, and charged the carpenter to hurry on his woodwork. The rest of the time was given up to completing the readiness to start.

Going on 3 p.m. the Englishman was walking the deck under an umbrella, when he perceived a boat pushing off from the wharf. It could not be Benito, in this huge shallow punt, impelled by eight oars, in the bow of which six armed men in uniform were standing, while at the stern were seated two persons in gay array.

One was a stout dame, extravagantly caparisoned; the other, a tall man in almost as brilliant and absurd an attire. The latter was not altogether unfamiliar to the captain, and he smiled in anticipation of the affair to be communicated.

Whilst the heavily laden embarcation bore down upon the cutter with a leisure which was insulting, Gladsden ordered his ensign to be dipped three times. Immediately he had the satisfaction of perceiving the flag of the British consul execute the same movement. Benito had, therefore, delivered his message, to which this courtesy was an acknowledgment.

Gladsden went below, and approaching the bulkhead, behind which Donna Dolores was esconced, whispered to her,

"Lady! I have reason to suppose that a boat is coming hither with persons on board whose intention is to seize on you and take you to land in the absence of your husband. Now, you need not worry yourself. Don't show any tokens of being here. I have answered for your protection to Don Benito, and I know quite how to take care of you, as well as my craft, against all the desperadoes in the Intendencia of all Sonora."

"Oh, do so, sir!" returned the young lady, a prey to deep emotion, spite of the Englishman's confident and jesting accent, "and we shall bless you! Out of the little window I, too, have espied the skiff coming; and I have recognised my aunt and the pretender to my hand. I would rather die than fall into their hands! Oh, why—oh, why is not Benito here?"

"Don't be under any uneasiness," reiterated the other; "I shall keep my pledge to your husband. Only, I say again, keep *perdu*, and do not reveal your presence by any noise."

"I promise to obey you, sir captain. You are a really good man! Heaven will benefit you for the protection you accord me. I shall go on praying for you and myself!"

"Very well; so pluck up, senyorita, and soon the fun will be over!"

He remounted to the deck. He glanced over the bay, and went to the stern with his marine glass, looking over the oncoming "scow" contemptuously to view the shore near the consul's habitation. A longboat, manned by twelve oarsmen, and carrying the English flag at the stern, was seen to quit the pier and steer for the *Burlonilla*, making good time.

The port was "getting lively."

Though things were going on nicely enough, Gladsden did not mean to be taken unawares, and, not to be blamed for neglecting to take any precaution, he

had a cutlass and a brace of boarding pistols laid handily on the sliding cover of the companion-way. In those waters one never knows how matters may turn out, and, to prevent the turning out being unpleasant, a man is easiest when thoroughly on his guard.

Though the English representative's boat had left the shore some time after the native one, it was not slow in overhauling it, outstripping it without deigning to hail it or otherwise notice it, and ran alongside the *Little Joker* on the seaward side, while the other boat was rather far away.

"Glad to see you, Mr. Lyons," said Gladsden, receiving the Deputy-Consul, warmly.

"Yes, here I am, captain. You can do anything you like with me, you know. Only, as your messenger was in a hurry to be off, I am very little informed upon passing matters, and I may be able to act better in your interest if you acquaint me how things stand and move."

Gladsden briefly told the story.

"Is that all!" exclaimed Deputy-consul Lyons, laughing finely, as Jews do. "Don't you be alarmed, but let me deal with this fellow. The friend of Don Stefano must be a suspicious character, and that he is the chief of the in-country night marchers, and also the doer of little piracies with this same brigantine does not, therefore, startle me. But your visitors are hailing you. You might receive them with that bulldog sweetness of demeanour which characterise us British," he went on, smiling shyly. "Before all, put away those weapons, quite useless. The affair will finish with more of a display of brass than steel or lead."

"I will hope so, though it's a thing of indifference," replied the master of the *Little Joker*. "Any way, I rely on you."

"That's the best."

So the cabin boy removed the weapons, while his captain, accompanied by the British sub-consul, strode to the gangway thrown open in the low waist, arriving just in time to offer his hand to the lady-passenger of the shallop. Behind her the drolly accoutred sham Chilian commodore scrambled aboard.

Donna Josefa de Miranda was of elephantine form, with her hair, neck, ears, and arms literally laden with gems, gold eagles, and Mexican coins, pierced and strung in the shape of collars and bracelets. A thousand dollar China crape shawl showed all its florid pattern in embroidery, spread on her broad shoulder. A figured muslin dress, much too short, was caught in at what she probably flattered herself was a waist, by a sash sprinkled with precious stones. A profusion of costly rings shone on her gloved hands. It was manifest that Don José de Miranda in his flight had left some valuables which his kinswoman had forestalled the executors in securing.

Nothing could be more repulsive in its uncomeliness than the swarthy lineaments of this corpulent being, whose carping physiognomy and small glistening coffee-coloured eyes wore an expression of indescribable spitefulness.

Close to her escort, Captain Gladsden undoubtedly recognised the scarred hook nose, hatchet face, and lank figure of his gambling opponent. It was the same grotesque uniform which had been donned to astonish the natives at the supper table of Don Stefano.

When this precious pair came in upon the deck of the *Little Joker*, the armed men attempted to follow. But Mr. Holdfast—whose enforced stay in the fort, penniless, scornfully used by the Guaymasians, had filled him with terrible detestation of all Mexicans in general, and Western ones in particular—gleefully obeyed his orders by bidding them keep their distance. At once the corporal seemed indisposed to bow to this injunction, and seized the turkshead

at the end of the rope-guard of the gang-plank, thus railed to assist the lady; the first officer, without losing an atom of his habitual coolness, shoved the skiff head off so roughly with his foot as to make the soldier lose his balance and fall between the two gunnels into the water. This, to the laughter of the seamen, who cherish an animosity towards soldiers, and, furthermore, against the armed police, always seeking an excuse to be manifested. Luckily, the soldier had kept his hold of the main ropes, and hung long enough to be lifted up into the boat to the disapproval, if a certain splash of a tail in the water not remote, signified anything, of a shark which had immediately prepared to sup on him instead of the cook's waste.

Meanwhile, without deigning to attach the least interest to this suggestive episode, the massive dame, giving the new master of the brigantine a lofty look, used her most cutting tone to demand, haughtily, if she were addressing the commander of the bark.

"Yes, madam," replied Gladsden, bowing stiffly, "for which recent coming into possession I am happy, because it procures me the honour of receiving on my deck as weighty a personage as your ladyship appears to be. To whom have I the favour of speaking?"

The proud woman announced herself, sonorously, as "Donna Maria Josefa Dolores Miranda y Pedrosa y Saltabadil de la Cruz de Carbaneillo y Merlusa." The hearer bowed deeply at each bead on the string, darting a look aslant as if he feared the little brigantine was rather top-heavy with all these names. Then she pointed to her companion, who had been eyeing the ship's new crew with an annoyed face which was diverting enough to any one in the secret of his interest, like an exhibition of a curious wild beast.

"This is—for you need save yourself the trouble to name an old acquaintance—Don Annibal Cristoval de Luna y Pizarro Almagro de Cortes," took up the gibing captain, with a wink for the consulary assistant. "It is rather crushing, besides, your ladyship, to have here a descendant of three of the conquerors."

Don Annibal was curling his moustache to keep his countenance. His native impudence was oosing out at every pore.

"This gentleman," proceeded the important lady, "is my son-in-law, hence his accompanying me."

"Your daughter must be a happy woman to be the mate of so brilliant an officer, an admiral, at least, I suppose?"

"Well, the alliance will not come off for a little spell, within these four-and-twenty hours, sir. To conduce to that beneficent result, you see me here."

"I am fully aware, senyorita," returned Gladsden, getting tired of keeping up the chaff, "that I would never have boasted the possession of this craft but for Don Annibal, but, in compensation, I hardly believe he comes to me to be furnished with a wife, unfortunately, unless it be the *gunner's daughter*, to which alliance he is heartily welcome to my consent. I am afraid he will go away a bachelor for all the marriageable young ladies here."

It is lamentable to record that the sailors, who had been bandying verbal bonbons with the soldiers, chafing on the shallop, raised a laugh at the expense of Don Annibal, who perfectly well understood, in his other part of pirate, that to marry the gunner's daughter, is to be bound, face down, on a cannon and there undergo a flogging. So he drew himself up with a savage gleam in the eyes:

"Mind what you say, or I will have you to know that I am very rich, and otherwise of good position. It will be easy for me to make you repent any insolence to me or my friend. So, take my caution for it, you had better be respectful, and not forget whom you are addressing."

Gladsden slapped the Panama on his head which he had so far held in hand.

"If it comes to that, ma'am," he said, "you must allow me to remark, with all the respect that you claim, and which I will show you inasmuch as you are of the gentle sex, and for that reason solely, that you are labouring under an error. You don't seem fairly to know whom *you* are talking to! I am the captain and owner of this goleta, and, moreover, I am a foreigner. My deck is the same thing as a piece of the country under the colours of which I sail. However grand you may be over there, on land, your power falls pretty flat on these planks. I have the honour to present to you the deputy of Her Britannic Majesty's Consul who will bear me out in my observation."

CHAPTER XII.

THE ROUT COMPLETE.

At this declaration of the modern "*Ego civis Romanus*," Captain Matasiete rather stepped behind the woman than otherwise, as a wary warrior chooses a cotton-bale for breastwork when bullets are likely to fly.

"Tut, tut, tut! what is all this farrago to me? In plain words, I come for my daughter whom you took off shore and have on this, I am afraid, piratical craft. I summon you to restore my child straightway, or I'll give you a tough bird to pick!"

Gladsden impudently looked from her to the salteador and then back again, as if he were in doubt which was "the old bird" she offered for plucking.

"And you will have me to deal with my fresh hand at ship-ruling, senyor," cried Don Annibal at last, having edged over to the gangway, and seeing the skiff drawn near enough for the soldiers, eager for the fray under the taunts of the seamen, to haply clamber on board to his aid.

The boatmen, whom he knew something of, and who might have numbered more than one of the former crew of the *Little Joker*, could be relied on to back up the musketeers, he believed.

"My young captain, if you play the resistant, hang me if I shall not bring you to reason and decorate a shark's tooth with fragments of your hide! Even yet, you do not know of what I am capable! *Rayo de Dios.* Mind yourself! Patience is not one of my virtues!"

The consul intimated to Gladsden that there was no necessity of an outbreak of temper, as, while the brigantine's crew could lay out the soldiers comfortably in a twinkling, his own boat's crew could eat up the skiff's propelling force without salt.

"Will you answer me, sir," resumed the stout lady.

"Senyorita," Gladsden responded, with all the self-possession possible, "I do not know what you are driving at. I have nothing to do with your bucket of tar—I mean your family affairs. and I do not want to dip into it. If your kinswoman has left your agreeable society, I daresay she had her grounds of

action. It is no look out of mine, and I shall keep my fingers clear of it, I tell you. Whether you go around rummaging for her or not, I shall pay no heed, so long as you do not flounce about my ship, hardly of your burthen for such carasolling, telling me your troubles. As for this gentleman," he went on, spinning round so fiercely on Master Matasiete, with the new log-line of nominatives, I warn him charitably that if he does not stick his long cabbage-cutter between his legs and scuttle off *instanter*, I will hurl him, his names and titles, his long nose and long moustache, clean over the side to regale the harbour scavenger. This little programme being clearly laid down, I rather think you twain had better drop back into your boat."

He thereupon turned his back on my lady as if to give his men the order. She retreated a step, but, turning as red in the gills as a turkey-cock, blurted out—

"Stay, stay, master captain. You shall not slide out of it thus. I have an order of the secretary of the colonel governor to take my dear child back from any place whatever."

"Suppose you are good enough to let me inspect this warrant, madam?" said Mr. Lyons, quietly.

"I have no objections. *You* are not a boor. Your residence here has civilised *you*. Is it not perfectly in order?"

"Beautifully inscribed, madam," replied the Pro-Consul; "only that writ does not run here!"

"Why not, pray?" she exclaimed, haughtily, bridling up at the implied slight to Mexico.

"Simply because the Port Governor himself has no right to issue search-warrants for foreign vessels, even though the application is backed up by so noted a banker as Don Stefano Garcia. In the first place, your complaint ought to have been laid before me—from the moment an Englishman is accused. I would have then opened an inquiry, and if it appeared proper that the British shipping in port should be examined I would have so advised Colonel Fontoro, and my chancellor would have been charged to accompany you in the investigation. I do not say that, on account of the somewhat slow movements of that peculiar creature, the 'red tape worm,'" he added, smiling softly, "all these indispensable regulations would not have tried your ladyship's patience, but, I believe, our office is credited with more celerity than your own government houses. At all events, as the forms have been ignored, this order has no value. I also think you had better retire, for this captain, as he notified you very kindly, has the right to tumble you neck and crop over the board, and what little I know of him makes it certain that he will not hesitate to carry out his warning if either of you continue obstinately to stay here contrary to his will!"

It is impossible to depict the rage which swayed the stout woman as she heard this speech, in a firm voice and peremptory tone. She flew out against the speaker, the captain and all the grinning crew, to the Chinese cook and cabin boy themselves, with all the strongest insults and threats in her resonant Castilian tongue, to which had been added the native additions not found in dictionaries of the Spanish Academy, which glanced off blunted from the frigid Englishman, however.

The prudent captain of salteadors and pirates, as the case might be, took care not to intervene while under Don Jorge Federico's eye. His own wandered after he had secured an open way to retreat, and he managed, unseen by the others, to exchange a glance with Ignazio, whose head just peeped up out of the fore-hatch, where he was ensconced.

"This is all very well," cried the enormous virago at last, "I do withdraw because you are all in the plot against me, and I have no power, poor little weak woman (*afeniquita*) that I am to enforce my rights! But I'll spend half my fortune to punish this outrage. Oh, that the guns of the island would blow you over the little stars if you seek to escape me. We shall meet again, you puppy; come, Don Annibal Cristoval de Luna y Pizarro y Amalgro de Cortes, follow me. I have taken a vow that you shall be my son-in-law; and you shall wear that title though it cost me my own name."

"You are not likely to lose yours by marriage," observed Mr. Gladsden, accompanying her to the side opening. "At least, I'll back that opinion roundly."

"Vulgar buffoon! she exclaimed, shrugging her shoulders till her jewels jingled like a head-mule's bells. "Come, dear Don Annibal; let us leave this Indian canoe. I repeat that you shall be the husband of my daughter."

The Mexican had stepped into the boat, spite of the rule to give place to the dame, and omitted to offer his hand, as a fresh arrival shocked his sight. It was Benito Vasquez Bustamente, coming off with his baggage in a shore boat, managed by a couple of Indians, one young enough to be the grandchild of the other. Both had those bloodshot eyes which are the living tokens of a life as a pearl diver.

"You may bestow *your* daughter on whom you like," interposed the young Mexican, at one spring impatiently clearing the shallop and the ducking heads of the startled soldiers, and alighting between the robber-captain and that of the *Burlonilla*, who seemed about to step into the flat boat and cuff the Mexican even there. "But Donna Dolores is only your niece, and you lie after the most shameful pattern when you pretend to the honour of being her mother."

This unexpected address so dumbfounded the huge senyora, that she almost fell back upon the soldier, and would have done so only that the prick of a bayonet, "peaking up," broke into her absence of mind, due to the consternation.

Amid a roar of laughter as she floundered upon the nearly crushed soldier, trying to right her upon her feet, the shallop was pushed off, and the Indians of Benito aiding the movement and from it glancing to the brigantine's side, their little boat took its place, and began to discharge the baggage which the pearl diver had collected to make his wife's voyage more comfortable.

A little while after the Deputy-Consul, thanked warmly by all parties concerned, entered his longboat, and was rapidly transported to land, even before the infuriated Don Annibal and the lady whom he had so feebly cavaliered arrived at the pier side. It seemed to him, as he glanced amusedly into it, that a strange face had been added to the crew, but his attention was immediately diverted by smoke beyond the breakwater, denoting the coming of a steamer, and he forbore to increase the humiliation of the two Mexicans by dwelling on them.

Not a quarter of an hour afterwards, as the steamer was signalled, and showing her private emblem, was telegraphed to Don Stefano Garcia as the *Casta Susana*, of Acapulco, direct from the Sandwich Islands, consigned to him, the goleta left the port, speeding under all sail, right through the steamer's trailing smoke.

For one second this vapour eclipsed the *Burlonilla*, which seeing, Matasiete standing on the pierhead beside the baffled Senora Maria Josefa, remarked:

"There is nothing under canvas that can take that craft; but I will have a try at it with steam. Will you come?"

"Anywhere!" cried the vindictive sister of Don José de Miranda, "anywhere, if revenge only flourishes there."

"I think," muttered Ignazio to himself behind this worthy pair, "that Don Jorge Federico had far better have left me first officer of the *Burlonilla*. At the same rank on board of the *Casta Susana*, methinks I shall handle my brother's pearls before he does."

CHAPTER XIII.

INTERVENTION.

THE *Burlonilla* proved herself commendably swift. Had she been even a faster sailer, Captain Gladsden would have never dreamt of going out to sea with a view of eluding any one curious about the movements of the eccentric young Englishman, after the disappearance of Ignazio being reported to him. Search high and low, not a trace of the rogue. Spite of the sharks at Guaymas, Capitano Don Jorge was so convinced that the lieutenant of bandoleros was inevitably fated to adorn the gallows, that he believed the rogue had reached land, or, as the Vice-Consul could have given him a pointer, been taken into the scow of his famous colleagues.

Without being aware that the steamer was at the command of those who could be accounted his enemies, and would be sent in pursuit, or, rather better to say, since Ignazio was the pilot, would strive to anticipate him, the captain made all haste for the spot indicated on Pepillo's plans.

Since Ignazio had but a vague surmise to go upon, the *Burlonilla* passed Point St. Miguel without anything hostile arising, and soon cast anchor at the second of the islets, in a chain which were named after the knots in the rope girdle of St. Francis. But the seafarers, men supremely practical, who do not fetch their similes from afar, had also preferred to take the protuberances for a likeness to the knots in a logline, call them, *Los Senyales de la Cordonera de San Francisco.* The good mission priests might protest, but the laws of the Medes and Persians are easily effaceable as compared with a name down on a sea-chart.

Between the mainland, where a dreary haze hinted of the smoke of sleeping volcanoes in the rocky ridge of the peninsula of old California, and the string of isles, the brigantine was made secure by stem and stern.

The mainland was rugged, and apparently admirably abundant with vegetation. There were giant palmettos tossing their feathery tops to every catspaw, in isolated clumps, among a verdant screen of varied trees.

Alas, for the trickiness of Dame Nature. That luxuriance was superficial, the verdancy that of worthless shrubs, cactus, and prickly pear, briar, vine and beach, plum, thorn apple and Dead Sea fruit. Behind that illusive foliage, sand, lava, stones, dust, formed the melancholy waste in which the scanty, wild creatures live in perpetual madness, induced by chronic thirst. Without irrigation, Lower California is an Arabia Petræ.

But as Gladsden had no intention to settle, he was content with the alluring, if deceptive, face of the country.

The first real annoyance was to find a small colony of Indian mongrels, painfully carrying on the re-raking up of the shells of the abandoned pearl-fishery grounds. Their huts were picturesquely perched on rocks, the leafy roofs ornamented with *gallinasos*, fowls, more than half wild, which indolently hunted for food in the natural thatch of palm and brush. These born pearl-fishers had been there so long, that they had laid out little gardens for ground and bush, fruit and vegetables, defended by live cactus. Above patches of sugar-cane glowed the golden globes of orange and citron, amid deep green leaves.

As Don Jorge Federico de Gladsden had come, not to scrape oyster shells, but to haul up a mass of pearls in a submerged box without desiring prying eyes to witness the operation, he allowed Benito to get the observers out of the way by simply hiring the whole settlement to go fishing at another point of the broken reef. From the brigantine they could be seen, without their being able to watch the peculiar fishing in which her crew were about to engage.

Fishing for pearls is a much more dangerous and difficult operation than is generally supposed.

Each of the several *piraguas*, or piragues, or dugout canoes, as you please, had two men, stripped for diving, save an apology for bathing-drawers, girded on by a rope. This retains to the left side a leather sheath for a heavy knife, not less than eighteen inches long and three fingers wide, sharp as a razor, intended to battle with the sharks and stripe-backs, *manta erayas*, a kind of galvanic ray of which the mere contact paralyses the victim.

The worst kind of shark, the *tintorera*, that is to say, "the dyer," promenades the Pacific where human beings congregate, and comes up the Gulf. One of the headlands on the east coast is named after this terror of the pearl-divers. The *tintorera* owes its cognomen to a singular peculiarity, which reveals his presence providentially to afar off. Pores around his muzzle exude a luminous, gluey matter, which spreads over the entire body and gives him a glowworm-like effulgence. Over and above this, the animal is next to blind, and consequently cannot go by sight alone to any point desirable. While, too, other sharks, to seize their prey, simply turn over on their sides, Senyor el Tintorera has to roll belly up completely.

When there are any such *squalæ* around the fishing place, no day passes without there being "knots to untie," between the divers and the tintoreras, as well as the manta-rayas, and, almost always, the men only cut clear after horrible struggles.

When the diver takes his "header," his fellow paddles the skiff forward so as to accompany the plunger's diagonal immersion, whilst his rise is, on the contrary, vertical. This is done to pick up the swimmer at the very identical instant of his reaching the surface, his left arm laden with oysters and his lungs eager to catch air. Then he climbs in, takes the paddle, and manages similarly whilst his mate does the diving.

Good divers go very deep, the most famous can touch bottom at twelve and even fifteen fathoms, and can stay under for seven or nine minutes, but these are rare, the majority not surpassing four and five minutes, which is very pretty. The mated divers keep on by turns until they have brought up the requisite quantity of oysters. Their gains are miserable, and these whom Captain Gladsden engaged were delighted to get a dollar a dozen. Many a shell has to be opened before any pearls are found; ten or twelve per cent. is a good proportion for the enriched ones, and then again, many pearls are far from valuable. The basis of the estimation is the orient, as much as to say the lustre of the concentric layers, the "water," the roundness, and the size. Those worth

a couple of thousand dollars are found on the South American coast, and still more seldom in "the Sea of Cortes," where we now are.

Whilst the hired Indians were engaged at this submarine toil, Benito and the two red men, old acquaintances of his, who would not have engaged themselves to another master, were searching the water at the side of the brigantine first, and latter, farther and farther away, accompanied by the yawl, two men pulling so that the two red men could rest calmly till they relieved the Mexican at the watery work.

For a time there was a growing belief that Ignazio's brother had lied, or that the chest had been burst by the waters churned up by the *temporal*, as is named the terrible wind, the West Coast counterpart for "the Norther" of Texas, or, at the best, moved it away into deep water. But Benito and his copper acolytes were expert in judging the aquatic "signs," and soon pronounced that the blueish tint that denoted a pearl-oyster bed, showed a bright bar from a break in its continuity. The chest had dragged, but was not lost. Within an hour, all three divers being down at once, the old Indian came up and uttered a joyous shout on expelling his breath. He had a fragment of tarry rope. Next, Benito struck the trail, and came up crying, as soon as he could speak, that he had discovered the chest, the buoys had been eaten away by marine creatures on the tooth of time, and the treasure-coffer had sunk, crushing into an oyster bed. The wounded oysters had exuded their pearly fluid and coated the strange object beautifully, and the shell-fish had settled on it, but there it was in its lustrous and lovely mantle.

The yawl returned to the brigantine with this good news. It was coming on dark, so that nothing could be done till morning, but make ready a drag and hauling and lifting tackle, the hooks of which the chief diver and his aids undertook to attach, as confidently as others would work on dry land in open air.

Donna Dolores, whom, as a young bride, her husband had allowed to indulge in all her caprices—and heaven knows a Mexican girl, liberated by wedlock, so to say, paradoxically, has an infinity of tastes to gratify—had indulged in too much sweetmeat to have been a good sailor. As a consequence she was glad of the suggestion of Gladsden that, during the anchorage, she should remain on shore in the best hut of the little settlement. With the things landed from the *Burlonilla* the *haquel* (little hut) was made tolerable lodgings—a relief to the confinement of the brigantine's cabin.

The night was lovely, after a glorious sunset, when the reflections of the sublime play of orange and vermilion suggested why the early navigators were led to call those upper waters of the Gulf the Red Sea (*Mar Rojo*), rather than because the united streams of the Gila and Colorado pours, dyed with iron and copper, into the clearer blue.

In the deep, deep sky the stars glittered like diamonds of more than mortal polish. There was a mingling of air off the peninsula fragrant with wild flowers, of air off the Gulf, of tempered briny billows bumping the rocks of Cape St. Lucas, and of hot, dry breath from the main land, rich with a honey-like sweetness that cloyed. All was still, all was lonely, and the sole cry, at long intervals, was that of the lean cayote, stealing over the sands and mingling his starlight shadow with those of the giant cacti, shaped like colossal men brandishing maces and clubs, as he curiously regarded the brigantine. If a slight breeze ran along the shore it almost musically clattered the oysters clustered on rushes and mangroves, standing part submerged. Behind them the mesquito and acacia, and back of all the sparse woods on the rising slope: beyond that peaks well apart.

Once in the nightwatch the look-out reported a red fire-gleam southwards like

a fallen star quenching itself in the Gulf, and twice smoke was espied in the same quarter.

They knew it not, but it was Matasiete, after a search of San Luis Gonzales Bay by daytime, pushing the steamer into the shoals around the Islands of San Luis and Cantador. The double incentives of revenge and greed made the amphibious rascal excessively daring.

In the morning, therefore, Gladsden coming on deck early to have a tub in the brackish water drawn for his ultra-English custom, himself beheld the chaste *Susana*, full steam on, steering for the knots of the log-line of St. Francis, and, logically, for himself.

It would have been hard to lose the prize just when he had verified its existence, as well as one may believe in a pig—we mean a pearl in a poke.

The *Burlonilla* floated two guns and a swivel, and no deficiency of small arms. The steamer had four ports, and canvas-covered objects, one at bow and one at stern, were no doubt the complement of her armament. She came down to within two cables' length of the anchorage of the goleta, blowing off steam noisily, not to say threateningly, and there let her both bower-chains run out. A kedge and hawser, let from the stern, enabled her numerous crew to moor her so that her broadside overawed the little brigantine. Before this manœuvre, Gladsden was fain to believe it was only one of the smugglers which often run up the Gulf and await the result of the negotiation of the consignees and the port-officers before returning to Guaymas or elsewhere, and discharging a cargo on which, thus, the Exchequer of Mexico is neatly defrauded and the public deficit is kept from lessening.

With his glass Captain Gladsden had recognised as the officer on the steamer deck none other than the double traitor Ignazio. It needed nothing more to understand that the new comer would stick at nothing on this desolate coast where the ship duel would have no seconds or interferers.

He was ordering Mr. Holdfast, after having pointed out the Mexican to him, to hurry all hands over breakfast with a little intimation that some of them would dine in paradise if they did not beat off the unwelcome visitor.

Suddenly the old Indian tutor and friend of Benito pointed shoreward. The canoe of the pearl diver was putting off with him and Donna Dolores. Instantly, being a little nearer, and seing the same sight, there was a bustle on the quarterdeck of the *Susana*, and there appeared in gorgeous array, even eclipsing that of the Chilian representative in which he had last been admired, the celebrated Don Annibal Cristoval de Luna.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE HAUL OF MILLIONS.

Soon a cutter was lowered, in which the Mexican got, with the radiant Ignazio as his coxswain, and four oarsmen, while the moment it started in pursuit, or as matters stood then, for the encounter of Benito's little piragua, Donna Maria Josefa de Miranda hoisted herself up the stairs and lumbered to the side of the steamer to gloat over the proceeding.

Gladsden saw that, though he had a boat got ready, the canoe must be met before he could intervene, to say nothing of the probability of a volley from the bow of the *Casta Susana* checking his attempt in mid-career. If, besides, the pearl-diver ran himself ashore, encumbered with the young lady, he was almost sure to fall among the mesquit brush under the pistols of the salteador and his lieutenant.

It was no question till the young Mexican and his wife were out of peril, of attacking the formidable steamer.

Benito's red ally, who had whispered to his grandson and drawn a nod of comprehension from the latter, had stripped himself, as did the youth, for diving. All other eyes were on the chase. They slipped over the low board unnoticed, opposite the *Casta Susana*, and as silently took to the water and swam away. It looked as if they deemed the impending combat hopeless, and, like the rat, quitted the surely defeated ship.

In the meantime, poor Benito, recognising with whom he had to deal, was plying the paddle manfully, whilst Dolores, falling on her knees in the canoe, set ardently to praying, her hands clasped, and her eyes on the profound sky. All at once, without giving a warning to the girl, so that she was shaken in her devotions, Benito turned the pirague somewhat, evaded the Susamalis boat, and went straight to a little rocky islet of some height, well covered with rushes and other vegetation. It would mask him from the *Casta Susana's* crew, though leaving that vessel between him and his friends. Possibly, he had no other aim than to deposit Dolores thereon, and stand in defence of her against all comers.

The Mexicans began to cheer their captain, whose boat, clumsily turned, resumed the hunt.

Very little could be seen now of the chase from the low-lying goleta, and though Gladsden recklessly climbed up the rigging to get a view over the thronged deck of the steamer, soon the piragua and the cutter were veiled by the islet from all the spectators, friends and foes.

"Every man to the boats!" cried the Englishman. "Arm to the teeth, and, cook, all the matches and tar; we'll board that beast of a smoky tub," appealing to the seamen's hatred of a steamer to fire their energy, "take her or leave her a prey to the flames! Every man, active and idlers, away!"

There was, indeed, a very fair prospect of the *Casta Susana* being taken by surprise, so enwrapt was the attention of all the people of the Mexican, taking the cue of Donna Maria Josefa, with interest and anxiety.

But the *coup de main* never came off. Half way to the target, Gladsden was startled to see her, previously riding, doubly secured, so stiffly, nod, and begin to rock, then cant at such an incline whilst settling down slowly, as to cause the Mexicans to catch hold of every near object.

A great outcry arose.

It was repeated with anguish, as the careering continued as if a giant hand was rolling her over. Then the black faces of the stokers and engineer were seen as they came climbing up on deck to add themselves to the no less terrified crew. The steamer's deck was at a slope of forty-five, everybody clinging to the uppermost gunwale, save the unlucky ones who had rolled to the down scuppers, in among the rubbish which a Mexican captain allows to encumber his upper planks. The swaying cannon above threatened to break loose and crush these struggling wretches to marmalade, whilst their *vis-à-vis*, bursting the port lids, ran out to the carriages and kissed the agitated water. Poor Maria Josefa, grasping a sailor round the body whilst he hung on the taut guy of the reeling smoke pipe, hovered over the knot of writhing, fighting men trying to get a footing on a surface every moment changing its centre of gravity.

At that direful instant the boat of Gladsden was slightly pulled down on the opposite side to the steamer, and two dark heads succeeded two pair of red arms, abruptly seizing the gunwale by chin and hands. In the mouths of both were the formidable *navajas*, "gapped" by recent rough usage and pointless.

"You, Diego? and young Diego?" cried the captain, assisting them on board.

"Yes; you see um steamer go down, and you see um pirates go up pretty soon dam quick! Old Diego and young Diego play sword-fish—we scuttle the steamer, see?"

In fact an ominous hissing seemed to indicate that the water rising within the steamer, well on her side now, was menacing a blow up of the boilers. The engineer and his mate fully foresaw this, and were scrambling into a boat, jammed of its fall in the blocks.

"Heaven guard us!" was the shout on the ill-fated steamer. Some forty men were seen preparing to launch the boats, or even leap into the water, when a louder scream, though from one pair of lungs, was audible over the clamour. Donna Maria Josefa, with the sailor on whom she would not relax her grasp, had rolled like a ball across the perpendicular decks, bounded over the bulwarks, now washed by the water, and splashed out of sight.

As if her plunge had been arranged for the eliciting of a salute, pistol shots from the rock islet announced that the pirates and Benito were at firing range.

There was chaos.

The hissing steam, the splitting vessel, the straining yards and masts, the knocking about of everything loose within the half-flooded hull, the exclamations of the men in the water, some of whom mounted on the drift, shouted out "shark!" no pen can do justice to, and to the critical situation which Donna Maria was the most prominent object, the centre, the feminine hub of a wheel of frantic men.

The Englishman took the only course, however risky, towards desperadoes who might not appreciate humanity. He rowed to the spot, reached the centre, and after nearly capsizing the boat, dragged the woman safe to the stern-sheets. The heavy mass lay there, inert as a stranded porpoise.

Shrieks, and the disappearance of men in the water, of whom no further traces were yielded up but the ruddy bubbles which marked a shark's wake, incited the *Burlonilla's* crew to greater speed in their rescue. But they would have been swamped by the concourse of frightened men, whom not even the presentation of a cutlass or loaded pistol kept off; luckily the steamer had finished her going down, having attained the level which was her altered draught, while the com-

pressed air buoyed her. The Mexicans, seeing her deck become almost level, climbed upon her in dread of the tintorera. Gladsden left these to count their missing, whilst he conveyed his cargo, as prisoners, to his vessel, where they were secured. He had the swivel trained for precaution on the unfortunate *Casta Susana*, smokeless, fireless, waterlogged, and retraced his course with a circuit to avoid the disabled foes, so as to bear the too long-delayed succour to his young friends.

Benito had run the canoe up a little cleft in the rocks, shoaled her on a stretch of sand, taken out Dolores and placed her in a grotto. Before her he rolled a stone, as a breakwater, gave her his revolver, and stood on guard only with the pearl-diver's knife, which, however, he well knew how to swing and thrust, as well as cast—a string enabling this latter trick to be executed without the knife being lost.

Urged madly on by Matasiete, the noise on the other side of the islet on his ship puzzling him, and giving him an earnest desire to wipe out the present vexation and return to his post, the boat stove itself on the rock. The water was not deep, the men could leap from stone to stone or wade. The waders, two in number, trod on a sting-ray or an electric fish, for they were heard to groan and seen to fall palsied in their tracks.

The rest confronted Benito. He drew their fire, expressly to prevent a shot being directed at his wife, and then met their charge in a mass. As the mob enveloped him, Dolores fired the revolver twice, more at random than with careful aim. One shot told, for a seaman left the struggle to go on of itself, whilst he reeled aloof, and tumbled off the rock into the water. Two more Benito gave a quantum of steel to Inazio and his commander were left alone to quell the dangerous young Mexican. So far they had not been able to use their firearms without the hazard of injuring their own. They drew off to fire with deliberation, when the young wife, whose head had cleared after her first shot, and who was made a heroine by seeing that the life of her beloved perhaps rested on the true flight of the little globes of lead in the revolver, let fly at Ignazio, whose backbone was broken by the two shots. As he fell in a heap, the salteador chief, aghast at being so quickly placed solitary before his foeman, wheeled round and fired at the smoke oozing out of the young woman's cave. She screamed, for a fragment of stone, cut off by the bullet, had fallen on her neck, and she believed she was killed, supporting the delusion by swooning away. Receiving no reply, therefore, to his heartrending call, Benito flew at the murderer with so awful a countenance and so menacing a flourish of the blood-smeared knife, that Matasiete did not pause to try to raise his name to *Mata-ocho*, "the slayer of eight." He backed, and then plunged into the bush.

"Hola, cobarde!" cried Benito, but the other made no reply.

There was a crashing of the bushwood, a splash, and all was silence. The young Mexican heard his name behind him in a faint voice, and renouncing vengeance at the appeal of love, went quickly to his wife. Dame Dolores required nothing but his presence as a proof of his safety to be recovered of her fright.

After making certain that the assailants were incapable of mischief, the two who had been stunned by the fish surrendering with as much alacrity as their confused senses permitted, the couple had the satisfaction of being hailed from the boat of Gladsden.

It is regrettable to say that the latter, in his concentration of thoughts upon the rescue of his friends, was deaf to his oarsmen beguiling the time as they shot by the wreck, by supplying the words to the notes of the key-bugle in the hands of their ship keeper. He was playing a song popular at the period of

the outbreak of the Gold Fever in California, of which the chorus runs someway thus—applicably, the singers fancied, to the situation :

"Oh, oh, *Susannah!* don't you cry for me.
I'm going to Californy with my washbowl on my knee."

The young couple were gaily taken off the islet, though the two Mexicans were left there to regain their clearness of wits, whilst a prolonged search was made all around it for the lost leader. The islet did not contain him, there was little likelihood that he had gained the mainland, though a sanguinary streak gave reason to the supposition that he had at least essayed to do so. No doubt of it, he had been devoured by a tintorera, unscrupulous about entombing the pretended scion of three of the great conquerors of Spanish America. It must be confessed that this tragic end caused no chagrin to the crew and extra force of Guaymas riffraff who acted as marines on board the *Casta Susana*. They blamed him for the whole of the disaster, and it was a good thing for his consort in the expedition, Donna Maria Josefa de Miranda, that she was remote from the crew, exceedingly spiteful since they had escaped a watery or a shagreen-bound grave.

That lady had been completely changed in character by her bath in the Gulf, a magic wrought by *Pacific* water which may recommend it in the future to the lovers of peaceful married life vexed by an irritating aunt. She showed herself quite kind towards the pair, and blamed the late Don Annibal for all her persecution.

Ignazio and his master having kept to themselves and carried away with them the secret lure which had decoyed the *Casta Susana* to lay her ribs on the knots of the logline reef, the Mexicans displayed no desire to linger. They filled their boats with provisions, loaded a raft to be towed with other articles, and, the weather being fine, started off to Whale Channel, intending to cross and coast along till picked up. The peninsula was too sterile to afford so large a party any hope of successful land marches to reach inhabitants. To have done with them : they had to cut the raft adrift off Tiburon, and, parting company, the three boats separately reached the port whence they sailed—having had to live on tortoise and even cayman—*en route*.

Long before their arrival, Gladsden's vessel had transported Dolores, her husband, and their aunt, fully reconciled, to Guaymas, where—as their marriage had been so informally and unceremoniously performed by a friendly priest—Father Serafino—they received the grand nuptial benediction in the presence of a numerous assembly of the best society, among whom Captain Gladsden had the honour of signing his name as witness. It is needless to say that Don Stefano Garcia, in considerable trepidation—walking like a cat on hot cinders, as the proverb goes—did not attend the ceremony.

Before the wrecked men of the *Casta Susana* came to port the treasure of pearls had been divided. There were other valuable stones, notably emeralds, but the pearls were worthy all of Pepillo's eulogy ; there were perfect ones for shape and other qualities—the pears, the globes, the flat-crown (tympania, or kettledrum-shaped, as the ancient said), in short, the choicest specimens imaginable of "the Pinnic stone."

Don Benito agreed to maintain the family of Pepillo and a sweetheart of Ignazio out of his half-share, amounting, as valued by Mr. Lyons (who had his racial genius for estimating precious stones), to £150,000, well over-running Pepillo's rough casting up. Both he and Gladsden placed a large sum in the bishop's hands for almsgiving ; they contributed towards the breakwater and so on, and then separated, each in his own way to enjoy the filibuster's hoard,

originally accumulated to revolutionise Lower California as a preliminary to annexing it to the United States.

Captain Gladsden sailed to San Francisco, where he disposed of the *Little Joker*, and of some of the pearls, and travelled overland to take steamship for England.

Don Benito accompanied his wife back to her paternal estate, which was to be their happy home.

CHAPTER XV.

THE PATHFINDER'S HONOUR.

HERE might the author stop, and, in sooth, he was going to write the words "The End," glad that the episode of the pearl-fisher had, at least, the happy *finis* so desired by the novel reader; but my editor,* who was smoking a cigar at my elbow, in my sanctum, and who had been interested enough in what I was dashing off to follow the lines over my shoulder, checked my hand abruptly.

"Here, here!" he cried, as "The End" was on the point of flowing from my pen. "Do you mean to tell us that you know nothing more of Benito Vasquez, his bride and his friends?"

"But I do," I answered with a sigh, for a sad memory had been revived by ne unexpected inquiry. "But may I not leave the Pearlfisher rich on his *acienda* in Sonora?"

"No," said my editor. "Why should you stop here? As long as you do know something more about him, the tale is not told. Our readers, who have become enwrapt in your hero—I may almost say your two heroes—will be charmed, I warrant, to learn all they can further."

"Now, do you really think," I inquired, hesitatingly, "that this continuation will not bore?"

"Far from that, since it will complete the opening. I must acknowledge that your finish struck me as pulling up short. To conclude with, 'And so they were wed, and all lived happy ever after,' is to be met with in every novel and romance."

"Have your own way," I answered, "since you wish more, my dear friend, I shall go on and give you the completion required, which, this time, you may make up your mind to it will not be rounded off at the altar. Only I would like every one to know that you, and you alone, insisted upon having it so."

"Very well," he said, laughing; "scribble away! I am sure we shall be the gainers!"

And now, dear readers, having protected myself as regards you all, I continue the story with the hope that the conclusion will interest you as much as, I understand, the foregoing has pleased you.

Mr. Gladsden went to England to imitate his friend and comrade by sacrificing to Hymen.

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* Of the Paris weekly newspaper in which this romance had delighted the insatiable reader.

He married, and had two sons. They were still young when he lost their beloved mother, and ere long, in accordance with that very contra-French custom of keeping the children in leading-strings which pushes the British boy into life beyond the home, they dwelt remote from him at school. He was, therefore, a lonely man. Politics had no attraction to one still active, fox-hunting was tame after his American experience, and yachting was baby-play to a genuine mariner.

Gladsden had already shown his remembrance of Mexico by investing heavily in its Western Railway, and hence he was confidently approached by the promoters of that link which should make it fully trans-Continental, and by the later projectors, who sought to establish the line between Guaymas and that running down through the wild lands to Santa Fé, El Paso, Topeka, and thus binding the Cactus Country to that of wheat, corn, and cattle.

From joining the board of the latter companies to volunteering to go out and investigate the causes of a prodigious slowness in building the line was an affair of short duration. Mr. Gladsden's offer was gladly accepted, and he started with alacrity, which proved how deep had been his longing to break away from social trammels.

This time he proceeded overland from New York, and finally surveyed the route of the Great Southern Pacific Railway as far as El Paso. There a chance speech overheard in the Continental House, which enclosed a reference to the rich land proprietor, Don Benito de Bustamento, changed his purpose to proceed still westwardly. He engaged a guide and horses, and was, at the beginning of May, traversing the Sierra de las Animas, or Mountains of All Souls.

On the twenty-fifth of that month, going on four of the afternoon, a time clearly indicated by the disproportionately long shadows of the trees on the sandy soil of the *savannah*, and the coppery red colour of the sun, which appeared like a fiery disc at the level of the lowermost branches, we see Gladsden and his guide mounted on native horses. The superior wore for old acquaintance sake the costume of Mexican rancheros, and his attendant the picturesque and typical garb of the hunter of the West. They were both armed to the teeth, as a matter of course, for, in this quarter, all honest men are exposed to the three heads of the South-Western Cerberus: that of the "rustlers," or white desperadoes; of the *bandoleros*, or Mexican thieves; and of the wild Indians, none of them uniting with either of the others, but true Ishmaels.

It was remarkable that the prairie guide, however, had acceded to the progress of improvement in firearms, in lieu of the long and heavy rifle so celebrated along the backbone of the Continent in the hands of the trapper and hunter, this man carried, like his employer, a finely-finished Winchester breech-loading and repeating rifle, much stronger and larger than the general pattern.

The pair had just emerged from an immense forest of cedar, which had never yet known the woodman's threat, though doomed ere long to feed a locomotive engine's furnace, and were glad to cry halt at the skirts of the covert. Then they trotted down to a pretty stream, which was one of the sources of the Yagui River, and bending so far to the westward as to make an inexperienced explorer fancy it had something to do rather with the San Miguel.

Indeed, the woodsman examined the muddy waters with serious heed for a long time, and executed some mental calculations in that wonderful untaught trigonometry of the frontiers-man. Then, stopping his *broncho* by a scarcely perceptible pressure of his knees, he bent gracefully towards his employer, and said, as he smiled good-humouredly:

"Hyar you hev it, Mr. Gladsden; this ar the safe ford, though the melting snow has set the sink-pits filling, of which I war speaking this noon-day."

"Quite certain, eh, Oliver?" remarked the English gentleman.

"I wish I was as sartin sure I shell die with my har on," was the other's laughing answer, showing magnificent teeth for a man of fifty, which hard biscuit and harder deermeat, with plenty of "chaw" in it, seemed nowise to have impaired. "Anybody but me mout go askew, but I have known all these *tracks* (he meant 'tracts,' for it was a trackless wild, in plain truth), now an' agen, off an' on, for over fifteen year."

"Pray overlook my offensive persistency, Oliver; but I cannot help observing that I do not see any of the sites by which, according to my informants at The Pass, I was to learn the exact position of a crossing line in a treacherous stream. And I have been a sailor, too, and accustomed to go any course, if I have reasonable bearings laid down and visible."

"Oh, I never mind your being cornered, sir," went on the other, still merry; "they forgot to tell you the distances in mapping out the pints. You cannot see the Chinapa Peak even from here. But it's all one, Mr. Gladsden; here is the point of the Yagui. Yonder, I can see the smoke of a *pueblo*—the village they call Fronteras, as they do half-a-dozen such places within a crow's fly along the borderland. That reddish haze is over the Rio Bravo, whence we came. Now, to reach the road to Arispe, you cross and you keep dead ahead, and you must strike it."

"Well, I must say, Oliver, that since I have had the pleasure of a journey at your side, all your information has been as credible as gospel. It is a long while since I was in the wilderness; but I did have a taste of it once, and I am confident that on more than one occasion already you have diverged from the apparently true course to save me from something unpleasant. I conjecture my equipment, on which I had no reason to spare money, excited the cupidity of some of the loafers at El Paso, and that we were followed."

"Right you are! and I threw them out clean twice. And a couple of times more, thar hev been injin 'signs' hot as cayenne. That's jest why I say you had best git over the water now, rather than wait any longer, though there will be less fear o' your hoss being carried off his hoofs."

"Fifteen years ago, my friend," said Gladsden, who had not failed to remark mentally, how little the speaker had dwelt on the cares he had already exercised to preserve his charge from the "hostiles," white and red, "I should have been so reckless as to say—since I should like our having a parting meal together—let us sit here and eat away! But I have no right to expose your life to peril, even if I had not two boys at home for whom mine is still desirable. So, if you do not object, let me show you that I have learnt prudence from your continual exercise of it, and that our repast shall take place on the farther side of this shallow, frothing, dirty-hued river."

"Nothing hinders me," answered the hunter. "Have things your own way. Let us hie over before sundown."

He looked to the mustang's already terribly tight girths, shortening the stirrup-straps and caught up some of the trappings which dangled in the Mexican style.

"Thar we 'do' the river," he said, pointing, "follow me step by step. I ought to go before, but your saddle-back is high, and you must triple your blanket across your shoulders and neck, in case of a shot. If we are fired on from the rear do not turn but fall flat on the horse's neck. If we are fired on from your side, return the shot at anything moving in the froth. If from my side, I'll deal with that. Leave your hoss free to step in the steps of mine, for the crossing-line is very narrer, the bottom one mass of holes and quicksands, and the current rushes like lightning where it does have free play; there is, moreover, a gulf below with rapids that grind granite like chalk. The least imprudence will send

us, hoss and cavalyers, rolling along like Canady thistle balls in a breeze. You hev your caution—no fooling, mark!"

All the hunter guide's mirthfulness had vanished, and the stern tone made Mr. Gladsden start. We know he was incontestably brave, and that he had gone through some such perils as now confronted him; but the advance of civilisation in the South-West had given him an impression that his former adventures were things of an irrecoverable past.

However, there was no time to meditate, for his guide had pushed his horse into the water; and the other immediately followed it. They, too, seemed imbued with consciousness of the situation being perilous, for, though thirsty, they did not attempt to moisten their muzzles, albeit the bridles, as Oliver directed, were slackened and the cruel Mexican bits ceased their tyranny.

The passage was performed without accident, and soon the pair were on the further bank in about the only break in a ragged, steep ledge.

"Hyar we kin stake out," said the guide, "and await moonrise for our 'forking off.' Meanwhile, that feast, if you still air set on it, sir."

They dismounted, the hunter went and drew water for the horses in an india-rubber saddle bag, whilst the Englishman lifted off a huge double sack from the back of his saddle, which is called the *alforjas*, and took out a deer ham and a plover already cooked, a piece of Dutch cheese so hard as almost to turn the knife, some green fruit, bananas, guavas, and chirimoyas which they had picked on the way to eat as a kind of salad, and lastly, some army biscuit.

By the time the guide had completed his duties, the spread was laid. A very sober man, as most of these borderers are except when they 'break out' and indulge in a week's heavy and uninterrupted drinking, much as seamen of 'temperance ships' do after a rough voyage, Oliver merely added as much brandy, of which they had a couple of flasks full, as would settle the mud in the water freshly drawn. They both drew knives as sharp as their appetites, and fell on the victuals without losing breath in a further word in addition to a brief but feeling grace which the Englishman uttered, and to which the American, whom the innovation reminded of the same religious practice, vague from its early occurrence in his life, said a hearty "Amen."

We take the moment, when this agreeable occupation rewards them both for a long, fatiguing ride, to trace their portraits.

Gladsden had become a trifle portlier, and had lost his sunburns. He was less quick to move, but more irresistible in action than ever. In brief, the hussar was now a heavy cavalrist, whom even these few weeks in the South-West had improved in mind, wind, and limb. His sight was dimmer, but he had no need of glasses to shoot well and straight.

His companion was a man apparently in the prime of life, but he must have been twenty years older than the three decades which seemed, to the casual observer, to sit so lightly on his broad shoulders. He was rather tall than medium, and the absence of superfluous flesh, and the unusual length of his limbs would make him look like a giant among the small-statured Mexicans and squat horse Indians, mostly bow-legged. His neck was short and muscular, and, thus, his head had a small aspect, like Hercules; the features were cold if not stern, and his cast of countenance was devoid of muscular play, except when one of his merry moods was on him. Vigour and rigour distinguished him on active duty.

Under a broad forehead, his somewhat deep set eyes, crowned with bushy brows, were of a changeable nature, for, while almost blue when he was calm, anger caused them to become dull brown, and they could dart flashes like those of felines, they were very movable and were continually examining things

around, save when he was addressing any one, whereupon they were straight, frank, and steadfast. His long brown hair, saturated with bear's grease—for your frontiers-man has a sneaking respect for the toilet—and hence almost black, streamed long and freely out from beneath a home-made hat of mountain sheep-wool and covered his shoulders.

His two names denoted the extent of his ranging ground, for he was generally known among his own race as "Oregon Ol.," and by the Indians of the Mexican border as "the Ocelot," that being the wild cat of the Mexicans (Ocelolt, in Aztec), a trifle less than the jaguar, but, muscularly speaking, very powerful and no joke for ferocious courage.

In the same way as this well-known guide possessed several names, he could boast various reputations. The United States Army officers wrote him down as kindly, never down-hearted in sun or snow, skilful, honest to a button's worth, disinterested, knowing woodcraft thoroughly, always ready, aye, even to help a friend out of pocket, canteen, or with his wits, bold to temerity when boldness was the best card, "reliable," and sticking to his man, friend or foe, to the last gasp.

For the redskins, Oliver was quite other game: he inspired superstitious terror blended with admiration; no one ever succeeded in contests of cunning with him; implacable towards any one who sought to injure or even annoy him, he would pursue the molester or molesters, one or many, to their final hiding place, cutting off stragglers, reducing the band like a man devouring a bunch of grapes, one by one, and knifing the last at his lone camp fire. "That will teach them," he would say, when reproached by new-coming dragoon officers, at the forts, who thought it unseemly for a white man to decorate his leggings with human hair like the reds. He meant that his punishment was to save, by its recital filling the Indians with dread, many another white man on the debateable ground, brother hunter, comrade trapper, emigrant, settler, pioneer, railway prospector.

We say "brother" hunter and "comrade" trapper, for Oregon Oliver only *shot* animals; to him, any other means of obtaining fur and feather would have been ignoble.

Up to some five years back he had been in the habit of transmitting money, acquired by the sale of peltries, by piloting wealthy foreigners over the hunting grounds in fashion, and by schooling army officers in frontier warfare, to some relation in the Eastern States, who had succeeded his parents as the embodiment of the ideal of home; but death having removed this claim, as he generously conceived it to be, upon his purse, he had no need to toil as formerly he did, and he led an easy life, following for the most part his own sweet free will, over the ten thousand miles which separate Southern America from the Polar Seas.

These two men, as opposite in nature and station as well could be, had made acquaintance in the most natural manner.

Mr. Gladsden wanted a guide into Sonora, and the colonel at Fort Fillmore, with whom he had been quail-shooting, had recommended "the champion guide."

Once on the road to Arispe, studded with hamlets, all of them, perhaps, increased in importance since Gladsden's previous stay in Sonora, a conductor was superfluous. At least he was under that impression.

Hunters never dally with a meal; a quarter of an hour or twenty minutes at the most suffice, then, if there be more time to spare, there is a chat amid tobacco smoke. Thus acted our two adventurers.

The rest of the provender was restored to the alforjas, and Oliver filled a sweet corn cob pipe, whilst Mr. Gladsden selected an excellent regalia in a prettily carved Guayaquil wood box. As soon as they were both under a cloud, they mused for a while in silence.

When the English gentleman broke this stillness, it was in the heartiest tone of good fellowship. It was to pay a compliment again upon the experienced guide and genial companion.

"All right," said the man from Oregon, "you are doing me justice: I hev done my level best. As long as all turns out well, and you have no dirt to cast on me, thar's no bone splinters in my meat."

"Oliver, you *are* a thorough white man," went on Mr. Gladsden, uttering the *acme* of western flattery, "all but the liver, and I'd eat that of the rogue I ever caught defaming you or your class!"

It was a savage way of putting it, which was not unfitting the scene.

"At home with a shoal of old servants about me, I would not lie down with the confidence that I feel in the desert beside you."

"You are painting it on mighty thick," was the caustic answer, "but you do not know enough of me to see that I am not any meet-every-next-minute kind of critter. Young in years, I was then aged by tussle and bustle. So, drop this flattery right thar which I shed, like a wild duck the spray of a waterfall. I hev carried out my engagement to a T, and that's all said and done."

"Stop a bit! I shall send you out some special present from England yet, over and above the mere pay. You have a rough mind, mate," said Mr. Gladsden, laughing.

"Not a jot, no! I am a plain man. It is all very well for you city folks when somebody has done you a good turn to talk of shining rewards, with the *idee* that you thereby put him in a lariat to folly you for the futur', but, how shu'd you! you are about wrong every time! You foun' this coon pooty nigh sweeped out of existence, for when a hunter has lost mules, fixin's, *and* rifle, all through them durn'd red thieves—Soo or Pawnee—he is an or'nary cuss on'y fit for the Injin boys to switch. Then you begun operations by forcing on me this harnsum shooting iron, which has made me take back all my ripping out agen new-fangled machinery in firearms. It's a 'stonisher!"—and he patted the wondrous weapon affectionately. "Think o' that, a marvel in *herself*, and an outfit in keeping to boot, and all gift-free! It's lordly, that's what it is, though I don't pass out well in knowledge of your lords an' sich. But I am off on a false trail. As I was sayin', the man who swallers promises and who likes praise is a hireling help and never a friend or *compadre*."

"But I take it, we do part friends as we have journeyed, eh?" asked Mr. Gladsden, offering his hand with unhesitating trustfulness.

"You bet!" replied Oliver, grasping the hand so hastily that one could see that he would not have given any pain by delay for the world. "You were recommended to me by a gentleman whom I hold as of prime vally. I hev seen the Colonel, when we were floundering in the snows of the Sierrar, give up his rags and his last drink of coffee to a poor mixed blood teamster! Why, I'd die for that man, and that man's dog e'enamost! I am ready to die for you, as his friend. And that's why it rode rough on me to have you want to break loose at the bank of this river, and plunge alone into the yaller bellies' district. You mout as well ask me to lead a blind man safe over forty rod of rough ground to the brink of a precipice, and then let go his hand, a-saying: 'Now, let her slide, old dark-y!'"

"At all events, you have fully done your task. But why do you again hint of danger? I give you my word that I have pricked up my ears—which is more than our horses have done—and yet not the slightest—"

"Go on talking, and louder," whispered Oliver, significantly.

The Englishman hardly understood, but he obeyed the sudden mysterious

injunction, whilst his interrupter continued with a vast relish to puff at his pipe, of which the smoke ascended thickly, and at regular periods. Gladsden listened, and stealthily gazed around, but to no avail. He then glanced at the American, who preserved the same ease of demeanour, and smoked as for a wager, his back to the stream, from which a sound of the turbulent ripple arose; the tobacco glowed in the pipe-head, and dully illumined his brooding countenance. It struck the observer, however, that Oliver's left hand was scarcely sensibly lowering upon his rifle, which, of course, was near at his side.

Suddenly, with an action as rapid as thought, that weapon was picked up and levelled at the shoulder upon a bush, very thick with foliage, about a hundred and fifty paces afar, and instantly fired. There rose a little smoke from the touchhole-plate, but no shot resounded.

Instantly a dark-complexioned man in hunter's attire bounded out of the shrub with a whoop of triumph, and pointed his gun at the couple in camp. But before the Englishman could do anything, his safe-conductor, whose features assumed an expression of scornfulness, pulled the trigger of the breechloader a second time, and the unfailing bullet dashed into the brain of the stranger even as he was about to shoot.

All this passed in less time than it takes to write it.

Up went the man's hands, so that his gun fell just a little before he measured his length on the ground, and curled himself up; no cry, no second spasm; he was slain straightway.

"Thought hisself a smart Aleck, I reckon," remarked the hunter, with continual contempt. "You'll crawl, sneak, and squirm no more."

"If your rifle had snapped again, you or I would have been keeled over," remarked the Englishman.

"Great Scott!"* ejaculated the other, surprised, and laughing heartily, though not aloud. "You ain't a-going to say you were took in, too? Well, I never! it must a' been a 'tarnal choice dodge.

"What do you mean?"

"No great witchcraft. Look here! this man here s a nalf-breed—Apache and Mexican, I judge. Well, he's been dogging us ever so long, mayhap from The Pass. Anyhow, I thought he got over the water by the False Ford, by the devil's luck, and, anyhow again, I see him lodge himself right plum' centre in that bush. Cou'dn't *sight* him thar no more nor a fat dog in an Injin village. But I was fixed in the fact that thar he lay, aiming at me or you. So, to fetch him out slick, I resarved some 'bacca smoke in my mouth, and when I clicked my nail on the breech, I just let the smoke blow off 's if it come out of the gun, d'ye see? Lor, how the idiot was sucked in, I reckon! He riz up, a-whooping his triumph over the old Oregonian, a-thinking me without a load in! so I had a right fa'r shot."

He went up to his victim and turned out his pockets, and transferred his arms to his girdle.

"He's half Apache and half greaser, as I opined," he pronounced on coming back. "So it would puzzle a Supreme Court lawyer to tell whether he is scouting on account o' copper colour or yaller belly. Jest bit the horses, sir. In either case we must file ahead, an' not let his gang catch on to us. Thar's Tiger Cat and his Apaches on the war path, I heerd, and Oneleg Pedrillo, the champion this-side rustler, never smokes the pipe of peace. I am saying nothing, make your notch, of the loafers who may have followed us, full of the prospect

* Gen. Winfield Scott, a hero of the War of 1812, and that with Mexico, is an idol in the American Walhalla. His name becomes an invocation only partially playfully used by the frontier army officers, their men, and the hunters.

of a rich haul, for I r'ally b'lieve thar's an impression at The Pass that you are an English Prince of the blood r'yal examining the United States to see how far South you want to annex it to Canada, though you ain't out with a four-mule team."

Mr. Gladsden did not laugh at the rhodomontade, while preparing the steeds.

The sight of the corpse, so lately a vigorous man springing out of cover to take his life, had in one little instant made him comprehend on what dangerous ground he groped his, perhaps, henceforth hourly-threatened way.

CHAPTER XVI.

A HAVEN WORSE THAN THE STORM.

WHAT a difference between this rough country, where the earth was full of pits as a prairie-dogs' village, and that old European soil teeming with hotels and inns, where the wealthy traveller could count upon a smiling welcome.

Mr. Gladsden's surprise was tempered with awe. All his ideas were perturbed. His notions of the true and false were upset. His education turned against him, and the instinct of self-preservation made him greet with joy all that he had acquired now of utility in that adventurous passage in his life which he had begun to deplore, and which he took the utmost care his growing sons should never know in detail.

He congratulated himself on having been prompted not to neglect physical experience in favour of the moral, and to fill his mind with practical learning. Intelligence was an important factor, but it had to be backed up by strength and skill to be a conqueror in the desert.

If ever he had felt the European aristocrat's conceit over the Western Americans, he withdrew any injurious depreciation, for he saw clearly that this New World belonged to the clear head and strong arm, and that there was no more desirable comrade than this embodiment beside him of the Great Republic, who had supplemented his inborn powers with the savage's sharpness, strategy, and address.

In other days, he had lightly confronted similar perils from sheer ignorance of their extent; but now, drawn back into the terrible whirlpool from the metropolitan centre of refinement, he felt his heart squeezed by a sudden weight; he was no longer sure of himself as danger, hydra-headed, appeared under new, frightful and multiplied forms.

It was in vain that he sought to recover the plenitude of his judgment. Nothing but the extreme stubbornness which was his racial characteristic, enabled him to master the strange emotions which he experienced, but, if he had lacked for daring and impulse of pride not to show the white feather before a man who he esteemed near enough of his kin to constitute a judge, this determined him to impress favourably at any cost.

While he was fortifying his will, Oliver had completed the preparations for a flight, taking it for granted that his obligation was not discharged till, this time, the English gentleman owned he was perfectly safe.

They mounted, and gradually increasing the pace, went on for upwards of three hours without exchanging one syllable or tightening the rein.

They kept the source-stream of the Yagui on the north, racing through woodland where the guide eluded the branches with miraculous dexterity, and selected "lanes" through which his companion could ride, with lowered head and knees pressed in, without too much risk of an accident like Absalom's.

About ten o'clock they came out on the plain, broken with isolated wooded patches. The night was clear, warm and starry. The cold and pale spring moon shed a saddening light, confusing the ground objects, and impressing the prominences of the landscape with an aspect both fantastic and solemn.

Soon there loomed up a definite form on the horizon. A light gleamed and then glimmered in the midst of a thicket of tulip-wood and magnolias. Towards this beacon Oregon Ol. directed their way.

"We are running rusty," he said, "hyar we kin ile up."

Soon the chapparal began to "hedge" away on both sides, and a rather large building gladdened the sight of the Englishman. Oliver showed no tokens of being similarly charmed.

This edifice, built of mud-bricks, sun-baked, and whitened with lime-wash, was pierced with six mere loophole windows high up on the front; it ranked midway between the ranche and the hacienda, that is, the shanty and the grange-house. Like all Mexican dwellings, it had a broad verandah sustained by pillars before the doorway, and a sodded flat roof in the Italian mode. All around it was a defiant wall in live cactus.

Altogether, as the Englishman thought, a most agreeable and picturesque habitation.

When the pair of horsemen were only a few strides away, the American pulled in a little, and, bending towards his companion at his knee, muttered:

"A regular whiskey hole I am taking you into, sir. But thar's no place else whar we kin halt for rest. Don't show disgust or astonishment at anything; let me have all 'the say,' and you kin lay high that we shell sleep as peaceably in that air den as in the best railroad hotel on the Great Pacific."

"The horses seem strong on their legs still. Why should we not press on to that village of which I perceive the roofs on the sky-line, shining as if snow coated them? Is it not Fronteras?"

"Nothing of the sort! Fronteras is the other side of the water—that streak of olive green with reddish shadow. That is no town, but a village of no account, a cluster of peons' cabins around the farmhouse. The sheep dogs would have to be beaten off from springing on our horses, and the labourers don't like *hereticos*, anyhow. No, our safety and comfort says: Camp down hyar.

"Nuther item: we have twice crossed a warm, broad trail of Apaches, I calc'late, over a hundred strong, smelling like p'ison of war-paint, and I go into cover when thar air so heavy odds. Yes, this child do. Yonder hacienda is called that of the *Ojo Agotado*, the exhausted spring, or we plainsmen and mountain men say: 'the Gi'n-out.' We shall not be received frien'ly thar, I say agen. Here, though, I can rely on being taken in cheerily, for the host would have lost his ears only I came along by the oak tree where he had been nailed up by them—little friskiness on the part of the ragamuffin warriors of One-leg Pedrillo's gang. Don't you fret: the Rancho Verde will house us, and you pertickler, first-chop, as the Chinee says."

"I do not understand, but I am wholly in your hands."

"That's the best place to put yourself. You kin offer me a testimonial in a gold frame hereafter."

They moved on once more at a good pace. As they approached their goal the light of guidance seemed to spread out. Soon they could make out that an

immense glare flamed from the open portals as from a crater, and they heard singing, whistling on war whistles, shouts, wild laughter, all jumbled up with the shrill twang of a guitar, of which the far from harmonious notes blended more or less satisfactorily with the rumble of a tambourine.

"Having a jamboree," said the hunter, drawing rein at the blazing doorway.

"Some unfort'nat' has lost his ducats. Uncle's swarming with robbers to-night."

The ground was hard as flint, and the clatter of the horses' hoofs had attracted to the mudsill (for the doorstep was embedded in the earth of the floor) a stout knave of some forty years, with a sullen eye, a ferocious mien, and ears as tattered as a fighting dog's. His peculiar complexion, yellowish, and muddy, and oily hair, denoted him to be no regular blooded white. This burly rogue, stiffly standing in the entrance, eyed the strangers sullenly without speaking.

The American uttered the religious greeting customary among the Mexicans, to which the regular counter-speech was grumblingly accorded, and, alighting, he subjoined:

"Well, *Tio Camote* (Uncle Sweet-potato), *hosquillo* as ever! Ay, even more gloomy! But how much longer air you going to keep an old *companyero* at the head of his nag? Don't you see with half an eye that my pard. an' me have rattled along as if your grandad Old Horny was at our hosses' tails, and that we want food and sleep as much as they do to bury their muzzles in oats?"

"Why!" ejaculated the individual, who, by the rule of contrary which pervades the popular idea of fun, had been nicknamed "*Sweet* Potato," "Heaven forgive me, but, as true as I am a sinner, we have here Senyor Don Olivero. Just overlook my not having recognised your senyory at the first peep."

"So I will, Aluino,—so I will! Only get the animals into the stables right smart."

"Like a shot, senyor," said the changed man with alacrity, and taking both bridles with no more pride than an hostler.

"Half a minute, uncle," interposed the hunter, taking him by one of the split ears playfully, and yet with significance. "I want you to keep in mind, Potato of Sweetness," he continued, "that your brother trusts the intire consarn to you,—cattle, harness, bags, and inn'ards,—the whole consarn, you savey?"

"*Yo sabe*," was the reply, tranquilly made, but the half-breed made a wry face which did not beautify its everyday expression.

"Now, that's talking. You know me right down to my boots. So, git you gone, but don't go to sleep, for I have something to talk about."

"In ten minutes I shall be at your senyorship's orders."

"Good boy, Uncle Al!"

The hotel-keeper went away grumbling louder and louder, with the horses for the *corral* (enclosure).

"Stick your pistols in your belt, and follow me. You air going to see no end of a curious circus," resumed Oliver to his companion. "Keep cool, and a little swagger does no harm. These here tough men and rough men must think you no tender-foot; I raythe guess they'll figger me up first pop, as raised right hyar on the plantation."

"I hope you'll be content with me," returned Mr. Gladsden; "I have made up my mind. I am not going to back out, but sail right over *the bar*, whatever the quantity of broken glass."

He laughed quietly, and assumed the bearing which he believed he had worn at the time he was clad in red flannel shirt and corduroy trousers tucked into cowhide boots when up the country, not a thousand miles from that spot, fifteen years before.

"That looks the ticket. I believe we are going to see some fun."

With that they entered the tavern with steady foot.

The uproar that hailed their entrance seemed louder than before. Neither of them, however, was affected by the malevolent greeting, but strode to a heavy table, hewn into shape with the broad axe, where they installed themselves, and proceeded to take a disdainful survey of the patrons of the drinking den. For their part they devoured the intruders with most ravenous eyes.

A pen dipped in vitriol would not adequately describe this vile haunt of all the scum of the border. The dozen guests were men of all mixed castes and hues, with hang-dog faces and in squalid rags. They were sodden already with the coarse liquor. The muddy, smoky, ignoble room was furnished with massive benches, stools, and tables, soaked with blood and spilt beverages. The bar had two 'tenders, men as sturdy as Camote himself, who carried pistols in hip pockets and long knives in sheaths at the back of their necks, more as if they were besieged behind the counter than anything else, so precious was the poison they served out. Their patrons sang, shouted, yelled, quarrelled, all through thick cigar smoke, played with greasy cards and yellowed dice, whilst one resumed pulling at his *heuca's* home-made strings. The gamblers, however, pulled out handfuls of gold and silver from the secret pouches in their bedraggled and tattered garments, worn from choice of slovenliness.

The scene was illumined by several smoky wicks swimming like decaying serpents in as foul green oil, in open lamps as antique in fashion as those now and again dug up in Old Spain. Each man had his own bottle, and the aguardiante, tepache, rum, and Californian wine, labelled falsely "Catalonia," flowed so profusely that some one was gurgling at them constantly.

Such was this palace of prairie pleasures.

The arrival of strangers had considerable effect. Far from benevolent squints, we repeat, were directed upon them fixedly, while murmurs of evil augury began to be heard. The objects of this growing ill-feeling replied by the most complete indifference to the provocations which were more and more emphasized.

"Warm," remarked Oliver sententiously.

"We are in a hot box," rejoined Mr. Gladsden.

"Yes, I reckoned it would be a mixed lot, 'stead o' which, they are all of a gang. All the *honest* ruffians have been cleared out."

As Camote did not hasten in, Oliver rose, went up to the counter, threw down a dollar, took up a bottle at hazard, spite of the nearer bar 'tender's scowls, and returned. He clapped it on the table, knocked off the ring of glass round the mouth and its cork a-flying, with a dexterous cut of the back of his knife, and poured out brimmers of wine for himself and his friend in the pannikin which, like a gold prospector, he always carried at his waist, and in the silver-mounted cup-cover of Mr. Gladsden's brandy-pistol.

"Here's to well-out-of-this!" he murmured in English.

"I concur," added Gladsden heartily, and they drank.

"The music is over. The dance is going to begin," said Oliver, putting his tin cup up in place.

Indeed, the guitar, so noisy, was silenced. The player, a tall, haggard, lengthened rascal, who seemed to have been once hanged and pulled out by the feet, suspended the instrument carefully up on the walls and advanced in a swaggering way towards the latest comers, his hat outrageously cocked on one side, as much to cover a patch whence a portion of the scalp had been removed as to look rakish, resting one fist upon his bony, prominent hip, and the other hand on the steel hilt of a very fine old rapier of enormous length. On gazing most

closely at Oliver, who happened to be the nearer to him, when he stopped in an insolent attitude, he remarked the additional pistol and knife in his belt acquired by right of conquest from the spy whom he had shot, and, after a moment's hesitation, his colour coming again more deeply, he cried, *ex abrupto:*

"Flames of purgatory! Gentlemen, I never knew of greater impudence than for you to present yourselves, after having murdered my brother-in-arms La Gallina."

"Caballero, what do you mean by that?" returned the American, as much surprised as all the auditors by this denunciation.

"Do you think I do not recognise the Chicken-heart's pistol-of-two shots, by the handle nicked with cuts for the men he has slain? Was it not mine first, and did we not exchange firearms when we became sworn comrades in life-to-death?"

"Caballero," said the hunter again, with killing politeness, "I believe I did shoot some skunk that came prowling round me at supper time. But, the fact is, I hate to be riled when I am eating, *or drinking*, and I'll put a bullet out of the same barrel into any one who repeats the annoyance. You hear me?"

"Shoot me!" cried the bandit in a furious voice, as he drew the long blade. "A thousand demons."

"Yes, you! right away too, you candidate for the gallows," rejoined the hunter, rising.

"We'll see about that,—Caray!"

"I guess *you* won't see much of it, though the principal body consarned!"

Already the hunter had jumped forward to seize the fellow by the neck and the sword belt; he raised the bag of bones as easily as if he had been a toy balloon, and getting him "on the swing," by an irresistible motion, forced him to fly twenty feet aloof.

"Excuse me not telling you, gentlemen, your friend was coming," he remarked, sarcastically.

The bandit almost flattened against the doorpost, and fell senseless just outside the opening, only his long arms within.

"Some folks air so dull, a man's obleeged to give them a warning," added the Oregonian, resuming his seat.

This feat had been executed so quickly that the spectators remained motionless with amazement; but on their anger enlivening them they sprang up, every man of them, and rushed towards the strangers with drawn swords and knives, yelling for blood and death.

The very brutality and causelessness of this fresh attack made it the more mortal and savage. These drunken vagrants were too much on their guard against each other, and, besides, knew their own opponents' abilities too well to fight among themselves, so that to fall upon strangers was always deemed more profitable. It was not, therefore, so much to avenge their fallen comrades as to obey the sanguinary instincts which the rudely-fabricated alcohol had inflamed, that they renewed this charge. They cared very little whether Gallina or hid blood-companion had been killed by the men before them, they fought merely for the pleasure of blood-spilling. Such a conflict of twelve to two was one of those merry bye-plays which varied the joys of debauchery, and would afford them foundation for bragging at the refreshment bar during the fandango. These men, moreover, being mongrels, hated the pure whites inveterately, and to exterminate them would be an excessive pleasure.

But as such bar-room squabbles are common occurrences in the life of a hunter, always incurred by him when he comes to the outposts of civilisation, they did not daunt Oregon Oliver in the slightest degree. The storm he has raised by the summary correction of the spoil-feast did not make him blench. No more was his companion appalled. The present peril had transformed the

gentleman. His features beamed with that glow of battle which irradiates the pages of Froissart when he speaks of the English knights travelling as far as Spain to war in fratricidal struggles which in no way really interested them. He even smiled, and aided his associate with charming readiness in his defensive preparations. These were neither long nor difficult to carry out.

They merely overturned the solid table on its side, one end against a cask, the other against the side-wall, their backs to the rear of the den of thieves. Kneeling behind this barricade they were sure not to be surrounded, had enough elbow-play, and could await the issue complacently enough. The banditti had barked their shins against the table, and recoiled on being faced by the two men, shielded from the knee to the chin, with flashing eyes between four revolver muzzles. They consulted in an undertone for a few instants.

"They see the tables are turned indeed!" observed Mr. Gladsden.

Meanwhile the cause of this disturbance, the tall varlet, had scrambled to his feet, clinging to the doorpost; he was bruised all along his body by the shock, and he came in among his fellows limping, foaming with pain and rage, and aching for revenge.

"You are pretty mates o' mine to shrink!" he sneered. "Afeard of a couple of Yankees!"

"Who's afeard?" retorted the precious crew, pushing one another.

"It looks so," went on he, with a grin of pain. "You are ten to two, and you plot and plan together when I, at least, pitched into them alone. If this be not fear it is an extreme prudence, which is its sister. Are you not bound to avenge La Gallina's death!"

"Yes, we are bound to avenge a comrade's death; but just count the shots in those pepper-boxes. It is not the question of our getting killed, but of smashing those, our enemies. We're in a lump here, in the open, and they are covered. I conjecture our order of battle is very defective."

"Right he is," chorussed the fellows of this orator.

"You are a flock of prairie hens! Haven't you firearms as well?"

"You won't see that they have those cursed repeating rifles also at their backs! Besides, these Yanks have longer heads than us. Ah, if the Captain were here! He knows all the tricks of the Norte Americanos, and can match their cards at any game."

"That's very true; but *El Manco* (the Maimed) is not at hand. He is not due yet. We must do our own work—so, have at them with what heart ye may!"

"Oh, we're choking with our hearts, Valentacho; but we don't care to be shot down like buffalo."

"Well, if it comes to that—if I must show you the lead again, here! lo! I lead; only, let's have you stick to me."

"Like wax! lead on."

"It's understood?"

"Plain as the Creed!"

"Then forward! and death to the Gavachos—curse them!" yelled the tall rogue, waving his rapier as high as the ceiling would permit.

They all rushed forward with exceeding fury.

"Take heed!" muttered Oliver; "two shots apiece, and fire low!"

Four shots of the revolvers stretched two Mexicans on the floor never to rise again; another brace that had been "winged," removed themselves out of the room altogether, probably to find the nearest surgeon. But the fillip had been given to flagging spirits; the rogues were excited by the pistols' flash and smoke. Their rage redoubled, and they fell upon the edge of the oaken rampart and tried to chop down the two whites within.

It was a horrible medley with the firearms spitting fire in all directions, as hands were jostled and the eager ruffians interfered with one another's movements.

Acting on Oliver's advice, the two besieged men wasted no more powder. Their rampart was the higher by three or four dead bodies hanging, bent in the middle, over the edge, and, standing up now, they met the contestants' machetes with their scarcely less long hunting-knives.

The robbers fairly howled with impotent rage, having never met such a provoking resistance. Valentacho was the most persistent of any. He clung to the table with one hand, trying to pull it over on its top, snarling like a wild animal, and showering blows of the cutlass on the foe too active to receive one of them save on their own blades.

"See here!" cried Oliver, "you that's so n'isy! Wasn't that first lesson good enough? Don't you know I'm keeping school here? Yes, Oregon Ol. is the schoolmaster right down hyar in Sonora, and it looks like I'll have to send you home on one e-tarnal holiday!"

The bandit ceased to yell, and, leaning forward, managed to clutch the *fresada* (blanket) of the speaker, which he had rolled round his left arm, *more Hispanico*, and drew him towards him, in order that he might, shortening his sword, stab him through and through.

"You are a liar, dog!" said he, fiercely, through his gritting teeth; "'tis you who are about to die!"

With an upward sweep of his right hand, in which he had reversed his revolver and seized it by the barrel, Oliver dashed the coming rapier aside, and, with a downward blow of the pistol thus converted into a hammer, he visited the Mexican's skull so violently with a concussion to the brain that the outlaw let go the grasp on the blanket and of his sword, and fell back among his comrades without even a groan. No ox could have been felled more swiftly.

The defeated and horrified rabble melted away in disorder. They had had their dose. They would have been only too glad to leave the scene of combat, but for shame's sake, and the dread of their captain not finding them at this tryst.

Oliver kicked away the cask which had prevented a flank attack, stepped clear from the corpses and his defences, and quietly going up to the bar, behind which the keepers had tranquilly watched as much of the action as the smoke permitted, he said:

"Another bottle! As for you *gentecilla*, clear away your dead, and sit you down and clear up your glasses, too. If any man goes out without finishing his liquor to my health, I'll not leave a mouth on him if a rifle be any utility in my claws."

The cowed mob obeyed the double order grudgingly but faithfully. The smoke was wafted out and up the hole in the roof, which was the chimney, and a little order reigned in the bar-room. But still the landlord did not believe it healthy to make his appearance, though his place was surely here. The two visitors took their seats at another table, almost in the midst of the prairie depredators, but no one interrupted their conversation this time, and the other customers, without conferring with one another, soon glided out of the Rancho Verde, and finally all had disappeared.

"We've a clean ship, Oliver," said Mr. Gladsden; "our merry associates have vacated this hall of rosy light."

"We kin histe in our nightcaps, then," replied the guide. "With such a gap made in One-leg's band, always provided it is his cuadrilla, we need not fear they will come in the night to serenade us. By the way, that endless fellow has left his guitar. Shall I play something skippy?"

"You can play what you please," returned the Englishman. "Only I vote for a dance tune. It is my belief that we shall not want for dancers."

Indeed, there was a clatter of horses' hoofs, without.

"Correct you air, Injin!" said Oliver, lending his ear interestedly. "Put fresh cartridges in! there seems an agreement by all hands that we shall not be let sleep in peace this night!"

CHAPTER XVII.

THE PUREST OF PEARLS.

By the noise of the cavalcade it could be calculated to be numerous.

Uncle Sweet Potato, who had so completely kept to himself whilst the scuffle had lasted, now appeared suddenly at the ranch door, with the alacrity of a man close to whose rear a red-hot branding-iron was being approached. At the same time, the riders stopped their horses there.

Tio Camote had closed the thick door smartly, and held a colloquy through a small wicket in its centre, in a language which was not known to Mr. Gladsden. On the other hand, Oliver had started as the dialogue progressed, and bending towards his companion, said in his ear:

"Indians! hostile Indians, Apaches!—*Mimbres* Apaches!" he concluded, as the speech revealed more and more particularities. "All men—they are 'bad'—I can smell they are charcoal'd—blackened for war! I tell 'er what, mighty slim chance but in strategem agen sich a powerful squad to whop. That's the voice of an old acquaintance—big chief—ah, he's head chief now! We hev swapped hosses, an' we've exchanged shots, but never draw'd blood, an' we may be considered neutrals on Spanish territory, but all the same, be on your guard. That fool is too much afeard on 'em not to let 'em in. Our hosses are not worth a red cent's purchase a piece, wuss luck! Those 'Paches are as fond of hoss-flesh as a Spanish gal of peanut-candy. Still, if in a wuss squeeze than afore, you reckon on me pulling you out clean."

"I am puzzled again. Is the Indian a friend or foe?"

"Both or neither. But, lor', in the wildest parts, I have gone to sleep with my heels to the same fire as my deadliest enemy, and woke up—well, I still live. It's 'cordin' to sarkimstances; and this here is a pertickler sarkimstance—crammed with liveliness to the lid, like a tin o' them Italian sprats."

"Serious! worse than before."

"Jess so. But don't show any surprise; keep *your* tongue out of the tongue-fire, and don't gainsay me in any way."

"I'm your puppet again."

"You'll not repent it."

"I am convinced of that."

"Hush, right thar! He's going to let them in. And they're big fool Injin enough to git off their hosses, wharon they'm as easy of movement as an eagle, and come down to common ground, whar they waddle like geese. These hoss Ingins are no beauties, seen so, hobbling up to a bar in a doggery, but they air fond o' white man's pison, and no two ways about that."

Indeed, Camote, who probably was not insured and preferred running the risk of being butchered in his house to being certainly baked when it should be fired over his head for his resistance to the command to open, bowed in the chiefs of the new customers' party, and their body-guard.

These six or eight red men silently placed themselves on the floor by one of the tables in a squatting position near the door, pulled out every man a tomahawk-pipe which they filled with *morrichee*, or sacred tobacco, which proved that they were members of an upper class, past masters in the council lodges, lit up and set to smoking, without any observations, though the pools of blood, and the shattered and bullet-perforated furniture, revealed that there had recently been a disturbance there. They even betrayed no token of having perceived the two other persons at their table, and the men behind the bar, who were exchanging dubious, uneasy glances, whilst they felt gooseflesh under their scalp.

But the American knew that a secret, quick glance had "counted" them, for he whispered:

"We're reckoned up, and they don't stomach *our* looks. Tell 'ee, sir, they don't like close shooting and tough chawing."

After a few moments, one of the Indians smote the table with his hatchet-pipe. Tio Camote ran over to the spot, with the most obsequious of hotel-keepers' smiles on his lips.

"Heap big drink!"

"Mezcal!" uttered the savages.

"Si, si, si, Senyor Camicho" (for *cazique*, Aztec for chieftain), was the celeritous answer, as the ranchero hastened to set half-a-dozen bottles of spirit and some horn cups on the bench, to be nearer their reach than the table, before them.

They filled up and drank with a gusto that proved they had overcome the counsels of their wise men not to let the fire-water be their tempter. They resumed smoking and the puffs crossed one another in the dreariest silence. Yet this silence was more appalling than the riot of the late brawlers in the Green Ranche.

These Apache chiefs were attired much like their leader and resembled him in build, being picked warriors, or rather, more probably, chiefs who had attained rank for fighting and marauding alone. They were large men for Apaches, and but for their legs being bowed by life on horseback from boyhood up, would have overtopped six feet. They were well built too, and their features not ignoble, though rapacity moulded the prominent traits, as well as could be ascertained beneath the streaks of grey, blue, yellow and red plastered on in accordance with laws or convention, in what space was left by a prodigious smearing with the war-colour in pre-eminence, black. As there were no signs of mourning, they had so far been perfectly successful in their incursion into Sonora, and had not lost a man. Their large dark eyes, deep and gloomy, sparkled now and anon with cunning.

Taking one as an example, he wore his hair gathered up so as to form a kind of pad on the top of his head, a very good idea for defence; some pendent plaits were not his own hair and had buffalo hair twined in them, too; to each was hung at the end some little charm, pebble fangs, precious stone in the rough, gold or silver nugget, and so on. A long line of eagle and vulture feathers, varied in hue, possibly dyed, stood up on his head and out from him right down his back, whence the line flowed free quite to his neck. Through the actual top-knot, a long eagle feather, in special signification of commandership, was stuck lantingly. This one in particular whom we are depicting, had mounted a pair

of buffalo horns adorned with ribbons and human hair, very fair or bleached, not unlike the headgear of the ancient Britons. Being out on the war-path, he had laid aside collar of claws, porcupine quills and teeth, and bracelets, so that the war-jacket of deerskin, beautifully dressed, gathered in at the waist by a simple thong, looked plain indeed. His buckskin breeches were ornamented with embroidery, and his stockings of American make were decorated similarly by the patient squaws. His moccasins were bright with beadwork and quite clear of entanglement, though it seemed otherwise, from the artfully arranged knee-knot of dangling feathers and animal tails.

For weapons they had the tomahawk-pipe of bronze, and scalping-knife, one or two bows and arrows, the lustre of the black strings showing human hair was twisted in them as a trophy; the guns were not very good, being cast-off army pieces, for which they had powder-horns and bullet bags, quite old-fashioned. Their spears were left without; they had raw hide whips hanging by a loop to the wrist, and ornamented usefully with a war-whistle for the issue of commands, more clearly sounded and distantly heard than by voice, a system known among the Southern Indians from time out of mind though only of recent years adopted by European armies.

Strange and picturesque to the Englishman, though their odour of smoke and rancid grease and horses would have been less unendurable in the open air, Gladsden owned that they were manly fellows enough who inspired reasonable respect and almost consideration.

Unfortunately for appearances, whatever their nation may have been in ancient days, now these Apaches are about the most plundering, murderous, ferocious rovers of the South West, especially hating all the whites. Liars and thieves, they are a scourge who must be crushed out by the civilisation to which they will not truly bow the knee.

Whilst these unpleasant guests smoked and drank, our friends pretended to doze. Camote would have liked to have shut up shop; but he was not the man, with only two assistants, to undertake to clear out the horde before he retired to his virtuous pillow. The mere prospective of a wrangle with these ugly customers made his hair imprudently rise like a cockatoo's crest. He sat up on his counter, with dangling legs that swung in concord with his agitation, with folded arms to look undaunted, but not losing sight of the reds. He smoked cigarette after cigarette, and gulped large draughts of *pulque* by way of consolation and to nourish his patience.

Meanwhile the night advanced; the stars were paling away in the celestial depths, and the moon "downing." It was nearly three in the morning, and yet the humbler Indians and the numerous horses without hardly betrayed their proximity by a sound. For upwards of three hours the Apaches had gone on smoking and imbibing without their hard heads giving way or any tongue being loosened.

All of a sudden the chief, who wore the odd diadem of horns, shook the ashes out of his pipe on his left thumb-nail, and spoke in a loud enough voice, though he still stared into vacancy. At the words, the American ranger started slightly, opened his eyes fully, and in a measure made a nod of courtesy.

"My brother the Ocelot," said the chief, "seems to be pretty much worn out to sleep so soundly. Were his eyes not sealed with sleep, he must have taken notice that a friend has come into the lodge of the 'Spanish Dog,' and has seated himself not far from the Hunter of the North, along with several braves of his grand nation."

"Resting the sight ain't sleeping, not by a long heap! No, Tiger Cat, the Ocelot never owns on to being wore out, I opine. If the Ocelot wa'n't staring at the chiefs, 'tis jest 'cause he has seen 'em, most on 'em, afore now, ginerally

when thar was smoke in the air, blood drops as plenty as rain up North, and ha'r in rich plenty—you could stuff a buffalo hide plump out. The Ocelot knows his place in this part of the kentry—he don't shove his claws into no chief's mush-and-milk. He sort o' keeps low till a question aimed at him, hits him fa'r and squar'; that's the kind of ginuine Ocelot, this Ocelot air."

"*Wugh!* the hunter speaks well," remarked the Apache, wagging his head with apparent satisfaction, "there's no split in his tongue. *Bueno*—good!"

"No, *sir!* 'tis a straight, whole, single tongue."

"The Wacondah has opened a slit in his bosom for the smoke of his heart to steal forth pure. His sayings fall sweet and soft on the ear of the Mimbres Apaches, for they are the words of a friend. Let the Ocelot talk on. It is so long since the Mimbres heard the music of his voice that the papoose that was at the back of the squaw now stands alone, so high,"—making an imaginary line in the air with a wave of the pipe-hatchet,—"and plays at shooting with bow and arrow at the dogs. But his whole heart has not sprung forward to shake hands with his brother. His face is carved out of white flint. Is there no smile? Is he not glad to see the best warriors on the Apache roving-ground? Is he not surprised to see them here?"

"Considering, chief," returned Oregon Ol., nudging with his knee that of the Englishman under the table, quite imperceptibly, "considering the Ocelot knew the Apaches were 'warm' round here, and that a call was down in the programme of the dance, the Ocelot has no grounds for opening his eyes any wider."

"U-wagh!" ejaculated the chief, evincing some astonishment himself, "the Apache chiefs were expected by the great pale hunter?"

"They jess was," answered the other laconcially.

"Arrrh!" sighed the Indian with pretended awe and an insinuating smile, "the hunter has met *the Book medicine-men* (preachers, missionaries) in the land of the beaver and white bear—he has been initiated into their lodge—he has a heap big-medicine, he knows everything."

"The chief is making merry, he is no longer straight with his friend. Whether I carry good or bad medicine, it don't help me much in this nick, as my brother ought to know."

"The Tiger Cat has been 'playing —,' with the Spaniards!" said the Apache, with an emphasis on the English word he used, which caused the hotel keeper to shrink, "and a cloud has settled on his mind. He cannot make out what the white hunter is driving at. He looks. He see *Nada*—nothing."

"If one of them stirs a finger towards me, shoot into the mass," whispered Oliver, rising leisurely, to his comrade.

He left the table, and strode up to the Indians, among whom he stopped, his back to the edge of the table they disdained, leaning on his rifle, of which the beauty and value (for a breech-loader is a miracle to their eyes) made their nervous tongues lick their thin upper lip and thick lower one like a snake when the game is presented.

"See here, chief," said he, "the Ocelot has hearing as fine as they make 'em, and the faintest sounds tell their story in his ear. Did I not know you and your cavalyada were down to'rds the Smoking Mountain, and have I not heard the amble of those mules out thar, a-toting a litter between them? In that litter is a white woman. I'm atter her, for her family's sake—what's the price of the captive?"

The Indians exchanged a look of amazement, but they were not disconcerted. Indeed, Tiger Cat answered without wincing:

"Who can make (dead) meat of the white hunter? Beside the Ocelot, the Tiger Cat is a prairie-cricket."

"Speak out plain, then, chief. If you have the woman along with you, guarded by your *soldiers* (the young warriors) so carefully, it is to claim much price. What's the figure?"

"The Ocelot has all the wit of the pale faces, all the cunning of the red men. The Tiger Cat does not debate. He has a captive of worth—ay, 'the purest of pearl' is worth her weight in dressed buffalo robes. But the prize is his. Why should the Ocelot hunger for the prey of the Tiger Cat?"

"You'll jess let me back out about now, chief," said Oregon Oliver, negligently. "If we cannot trade, we'll take the back paths apart from one another, and no bad blood."

He half turned as if to go away, but not without a glance of sympathy in bitterness at the certainly strange palanquin, draped with Navajo waterproof blankets, suspended elastically between two mules, now visible to him without.

But the wily redskin was evidently perplexed. The guides who have intimate relations with the United States army always are looked upon peculiarly by the Indians who have been thrashed by the blue cape-coats. He detained the hunter by gently plucking at his blanket.

"The Ocelot bounds away too quickly," he observed, as if offended. "Has anger flamed up between us brothers?"

"Ne'er a flame," replied the other, who was far from seeking a quarrel just then and there, with such overpowering odds in his disfavour, "but when we can't trade, let's sleep on it; we'll see it sure 'nuff, how the *dicker* promises."

"The white hunter has a stranger friend with him," remarked the Apache, with the abrupt change of conversation which is natural to men of no great conversational powers, and perhaps to let his interlocutor see that the previous subject was exhausted; "he is no hunter; I daresay he is a chief of many gold buttons."

He alluded to the quantity of eagle buttons which adorn the uniform of the United States officers, who, of course, dress up as if for parade, in "talks" with the savages.

"You are out thar', chief; he is no friend of mine, no military ossifer; only some traveller coming over the mountains to get into Greaser land."

"And you are his guide?"

"Who says so?"

"The Tiger Cat's eyes are sharp; he sees what goes on over the prairie and plains. Did not the hunter's ten-shoot gun (he could express only so many units by twice throwing up his extended hand) speak, and some mixed-blooded dog bite the river bank?"

"It is so! I struck a *coup* (French Canadian hunter word for a stroke of war, a blow). It's nothing to crow over; it's nothing to *cache*. When a mosquito stings, you slap, don't you? same when a mestizo buzzes close; you can have his topknot as much as you like. But why," added he, repeating the other's phrase, "why does the Tiger Cat hanker after the Ocelot's dead?"

"The Tiger Cat kills his own game. What he says, he says to let the pale face hunter see that he has eyes upon the land and the river. Now," he concluded, releasing the flap of the blanket, "my brother can go, and sleep, if he be ready to drop."

Oliver went back to his seat, carelessly enough to all appearances.

"What's that about a woman," inquired Mr. Gladsden, eagerly in a low voice.

"A guess of mine that hit to the centre spot. Those red devils have something in a hoss-barrow of which they are taking pertickler care, and they wouldn't show her up here, so I guessed it war a captive. Now, the captive they spare and tender 'so fash' (fashion), you bet yer life, she's something first-quality and

all the hair on. Besides, you hear him call her 'La Perla Purissima,' and that's the name you don't hear every Spanish gal wear. Though, I will say this for them, that where I durn a Mexican man half a hundred times for bad gifts, I bless a Mexican female critter once at least. The one's a tough knot, not wuth the burning, and won't make saddle-tree, picket-peg, or good arrow-wood, but the gals, most offen, is good stuff, and I'm a-telling you."

"A captive, a young girl, fair, pure; oh heaven! in the power of these demons!" groaned Gladsden.

"Don't shake the table! I've done all my uttermost: I made him think her family are already on her trail, that she's worth a huge ransom. If they've protected her so far, by the biggest of marvels in my 'sperience, why not a little longer; tell we kin git clar of this infarnal 'tanglement, and can swoop on em at our advantage? Daring is a prime hoss to mount, to show off afore the crowd in front of the hotel, but give me patience when I've got to hunt the red scalpers. Patience, sir! we've got fifteen shots to spare in each of our Winchesters, and the extra one in afore them; to say nothing of our five-shooters. Oh," he added, with a bitter and contemptuous look at the Mexicans, "if there was only enough manhood for *one* in them three, durn their greasy pelts!"

Unfortunately, granting that they overcame the Apache head-men within the four brick walls, there were many without who could set fire to the ranche and consume them like toads in a forest conflagration, while they would be as far from rescuing the invisible captive as ever.

All fell into silence again, save that the three Mexicans, nestling towards one another, ventured to converse in an undertone. The Apaches continued to imbibe and smoke their gleaming hatchet-calumets. This dreary and onerous situation lasted for all of an hour after the hunter's parley with the red men, till they had finished their liquor and let their pipes die out.

The pale dawning light not merely appeared outside, but began to change the colour of the glow from the nearly exhausted lamps. At the same time the fresh morning air began battling with the fumes of spirits and tobacco.

Suddenly the similarly silent Indians on the exterior awoke. There were cautious signals exchanged; the horses, too, participated in the growing agitation, and shifted uneasily.

Two Apaches appeared at the doorway and gave an alarm to the chiefs, who had pricked up their ears, but only then deigned to rise at full length. They spoke together. All but two left the house, and almost instantly a figure draped in blankets was dragged over the sill. Flinging off the hands clutching her wrists with an indignant outburst which made the wraps to fall, the white men and the Mexicans beheld a graceful apparition unveiled.

It was quite a young girl for age, but being precocious, like all tropical creatures, a woman in development, she looked only too lovely in such a miserably unfit scene, fragile yet exuberant, with fine, tiny hands and feet, and narrow waist, black eyes, fair creamy skin and carnation lips; her very step seemed not to press the ground. In her ears and around her neck were pearls of unwonted dimensions; but it was evidently her character and her beauty which had won her the title of "La Perla Purissima."

At the same moment a distant fusillade was audible.

"Follow, and do as I do!" shouted Oliver, taking his decision with that swiftness of the prairie expert, which is, perhaps, the predominant trait that most bewilders the savages, trained to do no act without the warrant of magical manifestations.

With all possible speed he flung himself forward and dashed the Indian to the right of him as far aloof as the walls, at the same time throwing his left arm in

a backhanded way around the Mexican senyorita's waist so that, in drawing her forward, she was immediately pushed behind him.

Gladsden—on whom the sight of the lovely girl had had a profound effect—had also sprung forward, and not exactly imitating the hunter, pushed with his gun muzzle at a second Apache, and, whether intentionally or not, firing at the same instant, a hole was actually blown through the wretch, who leaped up in the air convulsively and so received a terrible cut of the hatchet of Tiger Cat, aimed at his slayer.

"You've made your *coo'!* now kick the rest of them right clean out!" roared Oliver, stooping to avoid a pistol shot, and, in rising with a heavy stool in his hand, breaking the collar bone of the man who had shot. "Now thar, Caballeros of the bluest blood," he shouted derisively, "do something, only do something, if you want to sleep another night in your hide!"

But already the two remaining Apaches had recoiled into the doorway, encumbered with the dead body of their brother whose scalp they wished to save, and Tiger Cat alone really confronted the whites.

This seeing, Tio Camote broke the spell of terror that had converted him into a mere statue on his counter, and snatching a cutlass from between two casks, smacked the boards with it to make an encouraging noise, calling out to his aids:

"Upon them, and second those valourous foreigners!"

Tiger Cat, enraged at the captive being so swiftly snatched out of his power, levelled a gun at the poor frightened thing over Oliver's shoulder. But already Gladsden had the Apache on the flank, and being too near him to use his rifle as a club, shifted it into his left hand, and dealt the redskin a terrible fisticuff. Staggered at this unusual blow from a weapon not in Indian war practice, the chief reeled and fell into the embrace of the white hunter

"Whoopee," he cried, "I hev the varmint in my hug. Shut the door, you dog-goned greasers, and pile every mortal thing agen it!"

He hugged the chief so tightly that his breast bone cracked, and his arms, pinioned to his side, were numbed to the very finger, so that he let the smoking gun drop.

"Just pick his we'pins out of his girdle, and mind that pison hatchet-pipe, the least scratch means death!" said the ranger.

The Mexicans, inspired by this successful skirmish, had banged the solid door to, and added a table and three full barrels to its fastenings.

"Pooty!" exclaimed the man from Oregon at last drawing breath. "Let me have a yard or two of leather rope, d'ye hyar?" raising his voice, as there was a rising din without and a chopping on the door.

Presently the chief was securely bound and flung down on the ground where he was attached to the ring of a trap-door leading to a small wine vault, or rather cave into which, to presume from the air of them, the three Mexicans would have liked to creep.

The external noise ceased. There were but two or three sharp whistles of command, and a gentle creeping away of the troop, as it were.

"Some enemy of theirs exchanged shots with their pickets," interpreted Oliver, "and as he is in force and resolutely coming on, they have gone into 'cover.' If they are the pirates of the prairie, we are no better off than before, but we are 'all hunk,' quite safe, *sereno*, missee," he said, turning kindly to the young girl, "if they are Mexican soldiers or your friends."

She had joined her hands fervently; then, at the mention of friends, more clearly comprehending her comparative safety, she uttered her thanks in a torrent of eloquence, and the sweetest voice in the world. All the time of her speaking, stray shots punctuated her flow of gratitude, so to say. Undoubtedly

Oliver was right; some foes of the Apaches were giving them quite enough occupation to prevent them attempting to learn the fate even of their principal chief.

"Yes, they are my friends, my father, too, oh, I am sure my father is at the head of them?" cried the young girl, forgetting all her captivity, and its ignominies in her revulsion to joy. "Open the door to them."

"Stop! nothing of the sort," interposed the hunter, peremptorily. "Those are not the old muskets of peons, nor the captured French rifles of the Mexican soldiery. Bide! bide and we shall bimeby see about welcoming our deliverers."

And whilst Gladsden sought to console the little beauty whose face had become gloomy again, the hunter began to scold the Mexicans for their cowardice.

"But," observed Gladsden more and more perplexed as he examined the young lady, "La Perla Purissima, while very charming, is not a name. Pray who are you, senorita?"

"But," said she with a pout, "La Perla is my name, the truth, whilst Purissima is the flattery. I was christened La Perla from the main incident in my father's early life——"

"Indeed, indeed! and your father?"

"You are, insooth, a stranger, senyor, not to recognise the daughter of the very richest haciendero and proprietor in all Upper Sonora. I am, senyor, Perla Dolores de Bustamente y Miranda!"

"Dolores!" roared our Englishman, with the delightful leap of the puzzled brain when a solution is afforded. "Why I knew you all along by the likeness to your mother!"

And enfolding her in his arms he gave her an affectionate embrace, only a little less painful than that which had rendered the Tiger Cat *hors de combat*, and kissed her on both cheeks, whilst to her further astonishment, tears streamed from his eyes.

"Dolores! my dear little girl," continued Mr. Gladsden, when he could speak tolerably calmly, "did you never hear your father and mother mention an Englishman? but there, I am sure they put my name into your prayers, when you were yet in our cradle!"

"The Englishman! oh, the English caballero!" cried the daughter of the Pearl-fisher, clapping her hands together in enthusiastic glee. "Yes, Don Jorge Federico."

"George, it is! how trippingly my name comes off your honey tongue."

"That is easily accounted for, senyor, as it is my brother's."

"What! you have a brother! and they named their boy after me! Well, upon my soul! Here, you Oliver, if you don't take back your general denunciation of the Mexican race, we are no longer friends. At least, gratitude is not so ephemeral among them. So, Don Benito never has forgotten his old comrade?"

The young lady touched the pearls in her ear and at her neck significantly to imply that the story of the filibuster's treasure was one familiar to her.

"You are one of our saints, senyor?"

"Sit down, on my knee! Heaven bless you; I have children of my own, too! And tell me all about your home, your excellent parents, and your good, brave, handsome brother. I'll wager a fortune he is brave and handsome."

"Hush!" interrupted the hunter. "Draw the girl out of a line with that wicket in the door. Some one has ridden right up to it, jingling with we'pins. More war talk!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

OUT AND AWAY.

At this same instant a bang on the oak from a large pistol butt—so high up that it revealed it was held in the hand of a giant or a man on horseback, who had his reasons for not dismounting—fairly shook the massive door.

"Landlord, go challenge the new comer," said Oliver.

Tio Camote, however reluctant, was forced to obey. A second blow quickened his step, and he even smiled as if the peculiarity of its stroke were a well-known signal. He, therefore, opened the trap pretty trustfully.

A long hook-nose, scarred in the middle, and a pair of gleaming eyes in a rather bloated face appeared at the little square hole.

"It is I, the Captain," said a harsh voice with a shrill twang, testily. "We have brushed the brownskins afar, and we want refreshment."

"The Captain," cried Sweet Potato, falling back.

"Well," said Oliver, "who's the Captain?"

"Pedrillo! El Manco!" breathed the innkeeper, in awe.

"Speak up, you ass!"

"Captain Pedrillo el Manco," repeated the bar tender.

"Oh, One-leg Pete," said the hunter, with as much scorn as they displayed apprehension and respect. "Don't let me see e'en a one of ye touch that door."

He turned to Gladsden and the young Mexican, who was pale again, but courageous.

"You hev seen that the 'Paches even kin spare a young woman of beauty when their greed is keen. But, I tell 'ee, sir, I would rather all was back where we began to play the game, and yon helpless redskin up in arms afore us, than have this poor lady in the power of that villain who waits without, and is likely to wait till doomsday before I let him in. He's cruel, merciless, wuss than a Digger Injin, and words can paint no blacker! But he is a fool! he thinks he and his herd have driven away the poison-hatchets when their first chief is here! If the Injin will forgive this humiliation, which I doubt, hang me but I'll cut his thongs, set him on his feet agen, and we'll charge this scum of the brimstone pot betweer us and the Apaches.

"First, let those greasers know that if they breathe a signal to their kindred thieves, you will silence the spokesman for ever."

"One moment," said Gladsden. "This captain with the seared hook-nose—tell me more of him. In the same way that this young lady's face called up the figures of the past most sweet in my memory, that peculiar phiz reminded me of the most disagreeable scoundrel I ever came athwart the foot of. What's he like?"

"A hardened man-devil. He lost a leg, so that he always sticks in the saddle."

"A leg gone! how, how?"

"Chawed off by an alligator in some Texan *bieyoo* (bayou), so they give out."

"I have it! it is an old acquaintance! only, he lost his leg by a shark bite, I presume."

"All's one. Well, if you ever knew him, then you knew the biggest scamp unhung! And now keep those cowards silent. If we do not answer the bandit, he will think Camote was pushed forward as a decoy by some Apaches within hyar, and will be dumfounded."

After a pause the knocking at the door of the ranche was resumed, but as in one of the pauses, the angry solicitor of admission heard the "hee, hee, ha, yah," of an Indian song, due to the imitative skill of Oregon Oliver, he withdrew.

Taking advantage of this lull in the attack on the portals, the hunter went back to the prostrate Indian chief, who had been chewing a bitter cud, and squatted down on his hams in the Indian mode, at his head.

"Now, then, Cat, what have you got on your notched stick (record) to tell off?"

The Apache looked up out of his indifferent and impassible demeanour.

"The white ranger is a great chief," said he. "Not many would have snatched the pearl from among the head-chiefs of the poison hatchets, whose slightest blow is death. I say, he is a warrior. He has come to hear me sing my death-song; not to gabble to him like an old squaw. I am ready to begin."

"Partly you're correct, chief. I am not come to chatter like the mocking bird. But I prefer hearing your song of triumph to that of death and mourning. Have you heard the voice of the wolf-with-the-leg-off at the door of this mud lodge? Do you not know the voice of that dog, the captain of Salteadores?"

"Yes, the Tiger Cat has killed many of the foxes that follow that *ladrone* (thief), by walking upon them!" answered the Apache disdainfully.

"To the point, then. If I free you hand and foot, will you lend us your hand to help us shake the ground clear of these varmint? I'll give you a revolver to boot! and, more, you shall have one of these broken guns (the repeating rifles which bend at the barrel-end) which speaks all one's fingers times handrunning, with ammunition to feed her up as long as you run buffalo on the plains."

It was an enormous bribe. But the Apache was true to his wounded pride, and his inveterate hatred of the whites.

"The warriors that swing the poison hatchets," he replied, "lie wait in all the thickets around about the forest. In a little while they will fall on the Spanish, and then they will hear their chief singing his death-song, mingled with their whoop of triumph."

"All right," said the other, rising. "I thought it neighbourly to give you a chance. Sing away to your own pitch-pipe."

He went over to Gladsden, who leant on the counter, whilst Donna Perla, on the other side of the room, contemplated the scene curiously. The discovery that one of the strangers was the hero of her childhood's romance, had filled her with complete confidence, and she thought no more of prayer.

"Tiger Cat is a stubborn knot," said Oliver. "I can't squeeze anything out'n him. He's never spared any one, and when we quit this house I propose to set fire to it over his head. He has burned many a Christian alive, and it's sauce for the goose to roast him, too."

He said this so naturally that Gladsden knew he was not threatening wantonly, and so firmly that he forbore to argue with him.

"I am quite right in saying that the Apaches will never leave this place till they know the fate of their chief. They will soon attack the robbers. When they close we will sally out, trust to luck to seize three hosses for ourselves and the little donna, or to reach cover. At the last moment, since Tio Camote has been false and useless to me, I shall broach a cask or two, which will make a glorious bonfire, and the Apaches will only have their chief in a *puchero* (stew), with mezcal sauce!"

Nature now clamoured for sleep and food. Oliver seemed able to do without the former, but he never refused solid sustenance when available, like all the wanderers whose life is an irregular alternation of feasts and fasts.

Camote produced some sausage and corn cakes, as well as deer meat, of which Donna Perla partook. Gladsden and she dozed off, neither of them heeding the continual popping of shots at long range between the Apaches and the robbers. At about eleven o'clock, when the heat was perceptible in the closed-in room without large windows or other proper vent than the narrow smoke-hole aloft, Oliver made a sign for attention. The landlord was eating and drinking noisily near the Apache prisoner, tantalising him with all a coward's cruelty. His two aids had disappeared under the counter, asleep deeply, if their mellifluous nasal breathing afforded a sure indication.

At the back of the ranche there was audible a scratching at the ground. Some living thing was trying to burrow into the house. At the same time the fusillade of the Indians assumed a more regular form. Under cover of the guns the bowmen had advanced, and the twang of the string once or twice came to the ear to prove that they had pushed on near the dwelling.

It was provoking to see nothing of the skirmish, protracted vexatiously, like all such warfare.

Suddenly Oliver took up a large empty cask and placed it on the counter.

"Keep watch thar, whar the critter is boring, and blow out the brains of any head that presents itself, for we have none but enemies hyar."

He jumped on the counter, clambered upon the barrels, and with his hunting-knife proceeded to make a gap in the roof. When the sky appeared there, he enlarged the hole and venturesomely pulled himself up through it, crawling down on the flat roof. It was composed of sods, among which stray seeds had sprouted.

All the field, hitherto one of conjecture, was exposed to his experienced view. After one sweep of his vision, he came down to the floor, and relieved Gladsden's anxiety which had sprung up the moment he was left entirely alone for the first time since they quitted El Paso.

"They are all at hide-and-seek," he said, with a chuckle. "They do not make the bark fly (cut the skin) once in a twenty shoots! It's tie and tie in such shooting—why did their pap trust them with firearms? Ne'erless, the 'Pach air working to get into the ranche, and they will rush the greasers back. One-leg has ridden off and hidden, I guess. I can't see his hoss nowhar. As for the cattle of the Ingins, they are in two caballadoes—one yonder a good piece, and t'other nearer at hand. We kin strike for them with some chance. There's on'y young men guarding them—and we're good for six a piece *sich!* Wrap the little Senyorita up thick, mind, so she may not be *hurted* by a flying bullet, and we'll shine out galorious when we make our break out. When I say 'Out!' out we git!"

While the Englishman arranged the blankets and buffalo hides of the fallen Apaches as bucklers about Donna Perla, the hunter went to the back of the room where the scratching had changed to the scooping out of earth; a piece of stone had been substituted for the scalp-knife.

Oliver, though time was so precious, waited patiently at the edge of the floor and walls. At last, the earth of the former moved as if a mole was making its tunnel, and then a brown hand emerged from the crumbling clods of packed mud. On that hand the hunter's knife descended and severed two fingers as it was instantly withdrawn. The savage had the immense self-control not to utter a sound of pain, in shame at having put his hand so incautiously into the trap.

"He will trouble no more," said Oliver, wiping the knife on the leg of Uncle Potato's breeches as the nearest rag. "At least not before we will git out of the way to receive him."

He went across the room, and, this time, removing the barricade, boldly applied his eye to the wicket.

"Now's the time," said he, instantly.

In fact a volley and the hustling of darts and arrows passed the very door, followed by a rush of softly-shod feet as the Apaches at last charged the Mexicans.

"Out!" shouted Oliver, flinging the door open. "And you come, too, unless you like to be boiled in your own spirits."

For with one kick beating in a full cask, he fired the pouring alcohol with the nearest lamp, and pushed Gladsden and the daughter of Don Benito out of the door. A vast sheet of flame rose in their rear, and while Camote leaped through it, a fearful explosion in that circumscribed apartment denoted that another cask had burst, and was contributing to the flames. The innkeeper's assistants were unable to pass the burning fluid, and their appeals for help made the pinioned warrior smile with fiendish glee.

He began his death-song in a strong voice, though the blazing liquor, red, violet, and blue, gradually rolled towards him in his helpless state, with little or no smoke to muffle the rays.

Through half-a-dozen stragglers the three fugitives made their way, the hunter literally bearing them down before his rush, whilst the Englishman was as little impeded by half carrying the Mexican maiden on his left arm. However, the cluster of horses was reached, held in the usual manner by all the bridles being passed over one, which two youthful warriors, who had probably never fleshed the scalping-knife, were chafing at being detained there to hold. Besides them a stalwart Indian, whose flattened features hinted at the admixture of African blood, was on guard. Luckily he had fired all but his last shot in the skirmishing, and he had only one arrow left in hand. With that he sprang forward to meet the flying trio, using it as a stabbing weapon.

Generously renouncing the use of his firearms, with that sometimes imprudent pride of the Caucasian who loves to win at fair play, the hunter flew at him with merely his own steel blade.

Whilst Gladsden smote the two striplings to the right and left, and was choosing two of the startled and frightened horses for the girl and himself, Oliver was engaged in a terrible, deadly, and pitiless combat with his sworn enemy. They had grappled one another with veritable hooks of steel, and sought mutually to overthrow and stab. Their eyes flashed fire, they wasted their breath in taunts and revelations of the many deeds of mischief and death which they had respectively wrought among their opposing people, till their bated breath came but feebly through their grinding teeth. But for their speech in broken accents, they were scarcely human—mere wild beasts bent on rending and tearing one another till "the heart was bare."

"Oh, you air Mr. Rough-on-the-Herdsman, you air?" hissed Oregon Oliver, tightening a hug which the grizzly would not have disdained to borrow. "Well, Mr. Death-to-the-Cowboys, how like you that? You've 'rubbed out' three solitary trappers, ha' you? How's that for a rub?—and that, and, still again, that!" And hurling the wretch to the earth under the curveting mustangs' unshod hoofs, he nearly beat the last breath out of his wretched and bleeding body. In a moment he rose, this time not ashamed to tear away the reeking scalp of the Indian who had in his boasts touched on a painful chord.

"I bet my life," muttered he, seizing a horse by the nostrils, and dragging his head down irresistibly, "that Senyor Murder-the-Vaqueroes will wipe out no more lone trappers, durn his carcass—would he were roasting alongside his chief! Innyhow, he can't fall, scalpless, in among his brethren in the happy hunting-grounds!"

All three were mounted now, a task which would have been far more difficult

only for the horses which Mr. Gladsden had selected being by chance stolen from the Mexicans, and, hence, rather pleased than alarmed at instinctively recognising hands more familiar than their last masters'.

The two Apache boys were crawling away for refuge in the corral cactus; thence to recover from the blows, and hurl insults and stones.

In a glance, Oliver saw their only chance was to run the gauntlet between the burning house and those of the Apache's rearguard, who had already stopped, ceased to pepper the hidden bandits, and looked back towards the horses in such wild agitation.

"*Hep-la!*" cried Oliver to the herd, applying his heavy hand to the rump of the two or three that were within reach, "and away! *'Vantay!* (advance) git!"

The horses preceded the three, but the latter's mounts participated in the fever of escape, all the more as the heat, the smell, and the flames of the Green Ranche had struck their olfactory and visual organs with that terrifying influence of fire upon the equine race.

"Let 'em rip!" cried the hunter; "they'll not shoot in the midst, lest they hurt a hoss. They're outrageous fond of horses, these 'Pach!"

As the furious cavalcade trampled by the Ranche door, the Englishman fired a hurried shot within. Immediately, the chant of the Apache, which was audible above the crackling and hissing of the flames, ceased short.

"You are a good old hoss!" ejaculated Oliver, who divined the humanity which prompted the merciful bullet, though incapable of such foolish leniency, or, at least, inexcusable waste of ammunition himself. "He desarved all he was gitting; but, na'theless, it's better you had it off your conscienc'. He's a green gilly," he added, under his breath, eyeing his pupil approvingly; "but for sand—you bet thar's a heap of sand, thar. If it war writing-paper from hyar to his sprouting-ground, jest take him up by the heel and sprinkle him out over the hull spread, and there'd be enough to cover an old bull on the last squar' foot! He's made of grit, he is *that!*"

On the roof of the building they had perceived the blanched faces of the two bar-tenders. There they lay, after having been pursued up the gap in the ceiling by the fiery tongues, afraid to move, and so attract the Apache's view.

As for Camote, he had vanished into a nook no doubt planned for some such eventuality, deep enough to require digging out.

As soon as the fugitives were surely out of range, first of the Apaches and, then, of the bandits, sufficiently engaged by the latter to bestow no more than a couple of random shots on the adventurers, they began to pull rein hard. While actually looking back, there was nothing to see but the column of flame and blue smoke from the Green Ranche. But after having resumed their course, they heard a dull boom, like a cannon report, of which the muzzle was in a cave.

"The heavy mud roof has fallen in," remarked Oliver; "the chief's scalp is safe, and the spreeing-den of the Sonora bandoleros will never house them no more."

When the horses they rode were cured of their panic by kindly "horse-talk," of which the hunter was profuse, and when the rattle of the stampeded troop had died away utterly, the commonly dense stillness of the wilderness fell upon all around.

"Those niggers will go on yelling and pelting one another till their powder gives out," remarked Oliver. "There'll be scarcely half-a-dozen strokes to count, but, however, blood has been spilt, and so while they are scrimmaging, we can canter on."

Thus reassured, Donna Perla smiled again. In a few words she acquainted the hunter with such landmarks around her father's estate as to enable him to direct their course as straight as the *mottes* or "islands" of woodland in the prairie permitted. But if the Mexican lady and the Englishman argued well of the profound solitude, the Oregonian did not lay aside his watchfulness. Leading the van, three horse lengths, his rifle across the saddle bow, bent forward so that the animal's head shielded his bosom, and his eyes peered over the ears, he retained all that wariness demanded in Northern Mexico, where the axiom reigns: *Homo homine lupus*, not to be translated as it was done by an excellent trapper friend of the author's, a squawman who had wedded an Indian woman and so became an ally of the tribe:—"Don't feed *loups* (wolves) with hominy," but, "Man is a devouring wolf to his brother."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE OLD, OLD FRIENDS.

BETWEEN seven and eight o'clock in the evening the two guardsmen of La Perla Purissima were still riding with her in a somewhat melancholy mood. They had even feared her indications were wrong, particularly as they had met none of their native wood-cutters, employed by the Mission of San Fernando, or of the hacienda of the young lady's father, at the magnificent remuneration of half-a-dozen dollars per month, the insignificant rations in supplement being not worth considering. As a consequence the loan of an *ounce*, which vast amount they never dream of repaying, constitutes them serfs for life. Whatever the causes, not one of these slaves appeared in the land, where a carrion crow or two, that evidence of a settled county, now and then was visible, having perceived even so far away the battlefield contested by border-ruffians and the Indian raiders.

"Queer," remarked Oliver, shaking his head, and redoubling his precautions, whilst relaxing the pace for the same reasons, though they stood in need of food and rest at the earliest moment.

Their horses, too, which the Indians had ridden with that recklessness to their manner born, were suffering from thirst and enforced fast.

It came on dark, too, "a nigger of a night," grumbled the hunter, and not a star in the sky. Thick clouds, charged with electricity, coursed over head like antelopes in fright, urged by a gale that increased continually, and the rumble of far-off thunder warned them that a storm was imminent and shelter needful.

Still they rode on, doggedly, step by step, or rather, *paso entra paso*, which is the Spanish for intermingling steps, taken, indeed, by the horses shrinking together hoof-locked and trying to "hump up" their backs in alarm, when suddenly the pioneer's mount, lifting its hanging head and wagging its ears briskly, uttered a derisive neigh. So does the noble animal often express his lordly contempt for the humble by-brother, the mule.

Indeed, not far aside on the north-east or left, they heard the quick amble of some quadruped. In a few instants there appeared a shadow, which approached with a daring or simplicity which perplexed the hunter, already grasping his gun.

The hail of the on-comer was in Spanish, a religious greeting appropriate to the vesper hour, to which, involuntarily and through well-schooled habit, the sweet fresh voice of the Mexican maiden straightway responded.

"It is Father Serafino," she added in explanation. "Our Lady of Guadeloupe be thanked!" The name vaguely struck the Englishman as familiar, once upon a time, and he extended his hand to check the movement of Oliver, despite the recognition, to be wholly in readiness to fire.

Meanwhile the priest, for it was one, bestriding a fine Spanish mule of unusual size and docility, had come up.

As well as the murkiness would allow one to discern, he was a man of about fifty, but his broad brow was smooth as a youth's; sweet intelligence dwelt in the blue eyes which were shaded by long lashes under brown brows regularly traced. His face was perfectly cleanly shaven, and his long hair, only slightly threaded with silver, came down on his shoulders, and framed an oval visage. His voice was melodious, but not devoid of manliness. Altogether, the attractive and sterling man was a worthy successor of the brothers who accompanied the mail-clad knights in their inroads from Mexico to San Francisco. His simple costume was composed of a black gown buttoned all the way and gathered in by a broad band; his sombrero had been lost in his ride, made in haste.

This same precipitation impelled him to be brief in his story and in his congratulations to the senyorita for having been saved from the spoilers.

"Though there will be great joy at the house," he said, "there will still remain mourning, my daughter."

"My father! my mother!"

"All these are well, and so your brother, but he and his wife and they all in grief—an arrow, at random, entered an upper window and slew the babe in its cradle. The will of heaven be done in all things! the little angel, at least, will not be exposed to the horrors which I fear still are poised ere soon descending."

He closed his sentence with so sad an air that all gazed at him, afraid to question.

"Yea, terrible events are in preparation, of which the swoop of the Apaches on the farm and the taking away of the heiress form no adequate examples. At least, when they strike, they fly, and are gone like the hawk. But a danger on the very hearth is arising. In short, friends of my little daughter here, listen; the Yagui Indians, the Christians, the converts, the semi-civilised, whom we employ throughout Sonora as peons, field-hands or labourers, have seen in the too often successful raids of the wild brethren active slurs on their tameness. The ease with which this last band of Apaches overcame the servants of Don Benito has set them plotting, I know, to revolt against him, and against other masters, alas! not so kind, fair and punctual in payment of their pittance as your father, my poor child,"

"Of them, who is going to be uneasy, father?" responded La Perla, with the confident, arrogant smile of the daughter of the ruling race. "Have not these poor dogs many a time in my young life, brooded, ay, and yelped of an attack, but between the menace and its execution, what a distance!"

"That is the saying of a child, gentlemen," continued Father Serafino. "She mistakes this time. Acknowledging the good Indians to have been treated badly of late, they are out of patience. They are in active rebellion. All the Indians who were on our Mission have disappeared. Last night," he added in a whisper, "of my two brothers who went over to the farms of Bellavista and the Palmero, to inquire news, one only returned," this in a still lower tone so that

the girl could not possibly overhear, "the outbreakers had carried them by storm —massacred every living creature and danced round the blazing buildings, one of those pagan dances whose memories I had hoped we had banished from their darkened brains. The surviving brother, hiding in the thicket till he could secure a stray horse, heard their council swear to destroy the white man and all his works throughout Sonora and retreat to the Northern Deserts to live free and wild in the abominable practices of their ancestors. They talked even of attacking Ures, and said all the Indians in the pueblos would join them. What will the hundred soldiers at Ures do? I tell you, gentlemen, such is the general situation."

"It's a tight nip," agreed Oliver.

"Terrible!" added the Englishman, shuddering to think of the poor father, his friend, ignorant still of the happy fate of his child, and exposed to the overwhelming storm of the revolted serfs.

"It is good and bad, too," resumed the priest, "that the neighbours and kinsmen of Don Benito will be flocking there to celebrate the ascension to heaven of his grandchild. Good, that so many heads of family should be under one roof, but bad that their own homes should be without commanders at such an emergency."

"The Indians," said Oliver authoritatively, "will move in a mass, for they have not been trained as individual warriors; hence they will attack this house, which contains all they hate, their masters. My vote is: on to Don Benito's!"

The priest bowed at this utterance of a man of warfare. The English gentleman approved, if only out of eagerness to place Donna Perla in her mother's arms.

"I'll show you the way!" said Father Serafino, smiting his mule with his slipper. "On to the Hacienda of Monte Tesoro, then."

"The Treasure Hill!" Don Benito had erected his chief farmhouse as a memorial of the haul in the Gulf of California.

They tailed away at once in a new order; the mule leading at a good pace, spite of the obscurity which little impeded one very familiar with the ground, Gladsden following with the Mexican maiden, almost by his side, and the hunter bringing up the rear, ever and anon looking steadily behind him.

It was the middle of the night, amid falling raindrops of great size, that the little troop beheld the loopholed walls of an enclosure round the grounds of an imposing mansion rise up into view. All the gates and doors were wide open, and every window blazed with light. A number of peons, brandishing torches, rushed out to welcome those they took to be belated guests. But as soon as the illumination fell upon the beauteous face of the daughter of the proprietor, they sent up a ringing shout which revealed how deeply endeared was that master and all his kith and kin.

The farmhouse itself was engirt, and all its approaches encumbered by at least a hundred shanties (*mescals*) and mud-brick cabins, of miserable aspect, scattered at haphazard, and used for the abodes of the house servants and farm labourers. At the present juncture, though, the misery was gilded, since every hut glowed with light, and out of the doorways poured the jingling of tambourines, the banging of *tombays* or drums, and laughter; songs and shouts mingled with the tinkling and strumming of stringed instruments, in wild, thrilling native waltzes.

Though there were women and children squatting and sprawling in the clear space between the cabins, mounted peons, swinging flambeaux, were racing to and fro, at the risk of trampling on them.

On triumphantly and joyously entering the courtyard (*patio*), the strangers beheld a no less singular and picturesque spectacle.

Around great piles of burning wood, which would have roasted mastodons, whole trees being required to feed them, a multitude were revelling, swilling, and cramming, whilst a few in tatters, Indians as their complexion showed, were pacing the ancient steps, which so scandalised Father Serafino, and which were the ceremonial performances of the Yaguis, perhaps as old as the creed he so sturdily supported.

Through this carousing throng, spite of the spell which the announcement of the recovery of the maiden by the reverend father exercised tolerably potently, the horsemen made but new progress.

By the time they arrived at the wide portals, these were choked up by a party of gentlemen, in the front of whom, even had he not called out his daughter's name with indescribable joy, the Englishman recognised his former shipmate.

Yes, truly, the well-preserved gentleman who embraced La Perla was none other than our Don Benito Vasquez de Bustamente, son of the General-President of Mexico, now proprietor of Monte Tesoro and many another estate as rich, the pearl-diver of old.

When the haciendero looked on the group behind his daughter, glancing affectionately at the *padre* who was so close and old an acquaintance, and curiously and not very kindly at the American whose position he recognised, and whose buckskin frock was stained with blood from the fresh lank scalp thrust into his belt until he should have time to cure it, and comb out the clotted hair into fringe for ornament, he finally rested his gaze as if spellbound on the fair-complexioned European.

"Papa," said the Purest of Pearls, suddenly remembering that she stood in the place of a mistress of ceremonies, "I have the happiness to present to you the oldest of your friends, to whom I owe, as you have often told me, the bliss of being rich, with my mamma. I now present him, too, as having reappeared in our world after many years—mine own lifetime, in faith, in order to save my life!"

"Don Jorge!" shouted the Mexican, rushing forward and, not to be repelled by an attempt only to clasp his hand, enfolding the bashful Briton in a powerful embrace.

"My dear old Benito!" and the Englishman could say not a word in surplus.

"Gentlemen," said the haciendero, turning to his countrymen, without caring to conceal the tears of delight upon his black moustache and beard, "I have the signal honour to introduce to you the noblest heart that ever beat in the breast of a man! My friend of friends, Don Jorge Federico Gladsden."

Every head was politely bent.

"The honour falls on me," observed Gladsden. "As for the rescue of your child, it was a providential casualty that brought her across my path—the rest is all the work of this keen, resolute, prompt and fearless American whom I, too, call my friend in the same full sense in which Don Benito uses it towards your humble servant."

So saying, he caught hold of the hand of the hunter and squeezed it so heartily that the latter quite forgot a little rising pain at having been rather unjustly omitted in the young lady's presentation.

"And now," said the master, "let me lead you to my wife, and my son and daughter, whom, unfortunately, we cannot relieve of grief at their loss as you have done of his parents, by the restoration of our treasured one."

"Your son! how time flies!" murmured Gladsden, "though, for the matter of that, I have a couple of torments of my own. Only, less fortunate than you, my friend, I lost their mother long ago."

They had entered the house, where a silence ran before them and seemed gradually to begin to diminish the merry-making clamour.

"Yes," said the priest, with a sigh, "time is fleeting and death cometh as swiftly, and who of us can be certain of having ample opportunity to accomplish his duty—the task which heaven sets unto h m?"

The solemnity of the accent deepened a gloom already befalling the guests.

"The *padre* is right," broke in Oregon Oliver, whose impatience at the loss of time in ceremony was augmenting, "jest let out that you are coming to save the house from the scalper and pison-hatchets! what you've had was the *blazing* (marking a tree with a chop to denote it chosen for felling), the next call, the murderous-minded Apaches mean to fell the trunk from the topmost switch to the lowest bough."

All the gentlemen withdrew into a side-room, where the priest imparted his tragic intelligence. There was terrible anxiety, since the farming gentlemen had left their homesteads at the mercy of their peons thus denounced as treacherous.

"Well, senyores caballeros," said Benito, "since you look to me, I say with our Norte Americano (Oliver) that, under such circumstances, the determination we are driven into is the best. I have four hundred peons on this farm. Of the lot, I can rely on three hundred, for one reason and another. I know the bulk of them as I do my own children. Against the hundred, or near a hundred and fifty, since some off strange plantations have flocked here, ostensibly for the junketting, we can pit my gentlemen friends, our relations. Each of them is the value of five or six wild Indians. You see, gentlemen, I rate you very low! Now you require rest, a change of dress——."

"No, no," said the Englishman and his guide with one breath.

"Pardon me, a short rest is requisite. By that time I shall have made my preparation, and then we may put the finishing touches on our plan of battle."

"And Donna Dolores?" queried Mr. Gladsden.

"My daughter has gone to inform her that we have the honour and pleasure, *at last*," he said, reproachfully, "to see under the roof always bound to shelter him, our foremost of friends and benefactors. After your repose, Donna Dolores will have the honour to receive you."

The Englishman and his companion were led away separately by servants bearing silver lamps. The former was conducted through several corridors into a chamber, where the steward ordered another massive silver lamp on a table to be lit. Whilst a third peon held the lamp up on high, the other two noiselessly and rapidly prepared a bath of rose-water in the next room. During their preparations, two others arrived in haste with a choice of clothes, the underlinen very fine, and from the first Paris houses.

Meanwhile Gladsden looked about him.

The room was quite large, having two small windows and one glazed door opening into a garden. On the whitened walls were pictures in gold frames, such as are painted in a mechanical way for Northern dealers to send in quantity to New Orleans, Santa Fé, and Mexico, for sale by torchlight. They represented, after good and popular masters, scenes of religion, battle, hunting, history, &c., and were hung without order. At all events, they regaled the sight by their vivid colour. In one corner was a folding sleeping chair, on which were thrown splendid skins and furs and fine blankets, to be arranged as the sleeper fancied. The furniture was completed by a massive mahogany centre table, a square table against the wall near the chair-bed, two openwork armchairs, and some Indian wickerwork footstools. There was a pedestal of marble for a religious image, but the statue had been removed to figure in the hall devoted to the ceremony of the Angelito.

Whatever the English guest had said against his need for repose when

danger threatened, he had no sooner returned from his bath in fresh habiliments, to find on the table a tasteful spread of preserved fruit, smoking chocolate of fine savour and much thickness, and light pastry, to say nothing of some cold turkey and ham with golden-hued corn bread, then he did not blame his host for the insistance on overruling him. Lighting a cigarette, he reclined on the couch-chair, and soon sank into a blessed state of physical enjoyment less and less appreciated, of course, as his overtasked brain and frame lent themselves gratefully to slumber.

When he awoke, a couple of hours only thence, he saw the table again covered with eatables, but a great deal more substantial. It was laid for three. A couple of superior servants were just finishing the decoration with vases of spring flowers, and so deftly doing their work, that it was not any noisy blunder on their part that had aroused him. He did not like to inquire of them who were going to be his guests. Luckily, he was not long left on tenterhooks.

The door opened, and Don Benito, showing himself, made way courteously for Oliver to precede him. The American was clad in a Mexican dress, jingling and shining with silver buttons, and really would have made many a black-eyed damsel's heart ache at a dance in his new but not altogether unaccustomed array.

With fine forethought, Benito had arranged to take supper—or whatever name this midnight meal deserved—with his old friend and the other deliverer of his beloved daughter.

After appeasing hunger—for Gladsden's had revived, and Oregon Ol. never seemed at a loss to eat when anything was on the board—they conferred seriously.

The haciendero had made his servants and the Indians who were truly converts kiss the cross and swear to die for their master—about the only binding oath to impose on such gentry. A hundred of the least dubious were to be clad in a kind of uniform so as to look like soldiers.

"Your friend, our friend, will lead them. These North Americans have persuasive methods and a spirit which converts the timid into *guerreadors*—heroes even, which we do not possess, or we should not be the yearly prey of the Comanches."

"As to leading them," said Oliver, eating a tortilla smeared with marmalade with the gusto of a schoolboy, "I shall rather git on behind them; and how they will charge when they know I shall shoot the first that turns back on my toes!"

"If this is North American persuasion," began Gladsden, laughing.

"Jest another time. In brief, Don Olivero will take his five score sham soldiers out of the secret gate in the *corral* which, by the way, you may not know, every rich landed proprietor has in order in a country of revolution; and he will go and ambush a quarter of a league away. Meanwhile, we shall establish our watches so as not to be taken by surprise. If the ambuscade be discovered, Don Olivero will signal me by two rockets—red and white. If we, however, as is more likely, are first attacked, we shall notify him, in await, by sending up two rockets—white and red. Then will he lead, or follow his chivalry, and take the red rabble in the rear as they envelope my farm. They will imagine the lancers and dragoons have come from Ures or Hermosillo, and recoil on our enclosure. We will rally out, and we'll mince them up into bits as fine as that poor Matasiete was chewed by the sharks of the Gulf of California; eh, you remember him, Don Jorge?"

"Decidedly! he lives in my remembrance all the more lively, because I cannot have been mistaken in my impression that I saw him only this early morning."

"Saw Don Annibal, as he called himself? saw the gallant of my late aunt, Josefa Maria—and only this morning! Impossible! you are still dreaming!"

"My friend! as truly as your bullet creased that hook nose, I saw it at the wicket in the door of the Green Ranche Tavern. Don Matasiete, whose garland of names I cannot recal in full, was not entombed in the maw of the tintoreras, but escaped with the loss of a limb. In pleasant allusion to that disaster he is called 'The Dismembered' even now, and he is that One-leg Peter, or Pedrillo el Manco, who, it appears, revives on this frontier all the old tales of rascally doing for which, in former days, he was so famous. What's bred in the blood won't come out with the loss of a limb, you see."

"An enemy like that! so near me, and often! How, then, is it that I have never been injured by him or his band?"

"Really," answered Mr. Gladsdan, perplexed, "I am at a loss to enter into the mind of such rascals. Mayhap he is reserving you for a top-off to his career of scoundrelism."

The repast being ended, Don Benito conducted his old and his new friend to present them to his wife and family.

Neither they nor the other ladies had been informed of the terrible disaster in suspense; and, as far as they were concerned, as well even as some of the younger gentlemen from the neighbourhood, the festival of the Angelito was still proceeding.

CHAPTER XX.

THE ANGELITO.

THE hall into which the strangers were ushered by the host offered a most strange and striking aspect.

It was magnificently furnished, and gorgeously illuminated by numerous crystal chandeliers, crowded with rose-wax tapers, and hung from the ceiling. The walls had been covered with rare and thick old tapestry of exquisite work. The richness of the sculptured furniture in oak, mahogany, black-walnut, and ebony, surpassed in solidity anything seen abroad. The very catches, bolts, hinges, and locks, were in cut silver. The whole floor was covered with very fine palm-matting, or *petate*.

Two carpet-covered platforms were erected, one at each end of this hall, wherein some three hundred persons were looking at the principal stage, and the sole one tenanted since, at a command from Don Benito, the musicians had vacated the other, intended only for them.

This second dais was arranged as an alcove, curtained in. Religious emblems, in gold and jewels, decorated the depths. The poor little child, victim of the Apache's missiles, powdered and rouged, was propped up in a draped chair, clad in white satin and lace, and covered with flowers, many more fading blooms strewing the floor.

The mother of this grandchild of Don Benito was seated near her little one.

She was a very young wife, of scarcely more years than Donna Perla; of equally rare beauty, but of corpse-like pallor from her vigils and sorrow, which was rendered the more palpable by her cheeks being thickly reddened with paint. Her fixed eyes, circled with black, gazed into vacancy with wild feverishness. She tried to wear a calmly joyful smile; but often a painful spasm convulsed her features, set her lips quivering, her limbs shivering, and shook muffled sobs from her bosom.

About her were seated ladies, mostly young and fair, who were attempting not to console the poor mother, but to cheer her up, as their belief dictated.

The other guests were grouped around, chatting, smoking, and taking refreshment from sideboards.

Don Benito saw, and perhaps in a measure comprehended, the reproving, or, at least, pained look in the eyes of both the European and the American, shocked at such a scene when they were so full of perturbation for the impending conflict.

"Conduct the reverend Father Serafino hither," he said to a servant.

A handsome and haughty youth, whom Mr. Gladsden recognised at once by his resemblance to his father, came up to the new-comer, and affectionately threw himself into his arms. It was Don Jorge, the bereaved father, though quite a boy in Mr. Gladsden's opinion.

"Caballero," said he; "nothing but your coming, the dearest, oldest friend of my father, could have given me this moment's distraction in my grief over my first-born. Yours was the kindness that united my father and mother. However can we repay the obligation we, their children, lie beneath?"

"By showing me as much affection as I shall do to you, Jorge, my boy. Upon my word, if I required any reward, I have it now amply, by shaking the hand of so promising a namesake."

The young mother made an effort, smiled dolefully, and let her burning hand rest in Mr. Gladsden's, while he kissed her equally heated forehead, and then threw a few of the already wilting spring flowerets upon the lap of the little corpse.

During this, Father Serafino had come into the hall. Instantly on seeing him all chatter ceased, and on every side the ladies and gentlemen respectfully saluted him.

Meanwhile, Gladsden turned sorrowfully to a lady in black and rose satin, covered with jewelry, in whom he well knew again, spite of a loss of slenderness, the graceful Dolores who had been his passenger on the *Little Joker*.

Her emotion was too full for words as she clasped his proffered hand in both hers, shining with rings, among which emeralds and pearls gleamed, due to that hoard he had inherited and shared with this noble family.

They had no leisure for a conversation, as the priest, at the suggestion of the host, had slowly mounted the musicians' platform, and now said in a sympathetic but firm voice:—

"Young mother, retire now into your private apartments and there give free way to your woes. Go, and in praying forget not, together with your blessed babe, all those who are within the precincts of this house, inasmuch as an unexampled danger menaces them. And you, my sisters," he continued, addressing the other ladies, "accompany your kinswoman and friend, console her and join in her prayers. Your place is no longer here."

The young mother rose with a sudden sob, and in an instant her face was flooded with tears. Her mother stepped in between her and the dead child, whereupon, as though that interposition and eclipsing of her lost treasure had broken a binding link, Don Jorge's wife swooned away in the arms of her friends. They all clustered round, and she and her mother were borne away in their midst, amid softened wailing and muttered sympathy.

The rest of the guests not in the secret were overwhelmed by stupor; and indeed, had any one but the priest thus put an end to the important ceremony, they would have loudly protested and even hushed him up.

"My brethren," resumed he, in a clear, full voice, "hearken to my words and gather up all your courage. Throughout this entire province, the Yagui Indians have broken their bondage. They threaten Ures and Hermosillo; already they have over-swarmed I know not how many farms—those houses are smouldering, their people are stiffening after indescribable tortures! I come hither to warn our friend that Monte-Tesoro is the object of the rebels' march. To-night, the attack will come, peradventure in one short hour! Brethren, verily I bid ye not forget that the enemies who threaten ye are ferocious pagans from whom you can expect no mercy! Resist them you must, forasmuch as in resisting them you preserve the people and the habitations deeper in the land, as well as all the women and youth providentially here. Thankful am I that the heavenly Hand hath guided me hither to warn you of the wrath let loose, to cheer you in your tribulations! Hence, silenced be merriment! cessation to all frivolous feasting! On our knees, brethren, and let us all beseech the good and merciful Power, without whom man is as naught, to make ye invincible."

It was a still more singular sight, more grand and impressive, when the gay guests knelt in that glittering hall, redolent with flowers, smoke of funeral meats, and incense, whilst the only upright thing was the baby corpse in its chair of state, seeming to smile with a blushing face, like an infant prince receiving homage.

When the Mexican gentlemen rose, their eyes were sparkling with courage, enthusiasm, and resolution.

"Alerta! alerta!" arose without, as the principal note and the only intelligible one in the clamour, more and more loud.

And "Alerta!" shouted an old major-domo, bursting into the hall with his white hair streaming. "Oh, master! the Indians approach! the revolted peons are pursuing a track of blood and fire! The pueblos, as far as the eye can reach, are ablaze. The hosts will be at our stockade in an hour! Already the patio is crowded with a throng of fugitives!"

It was overabundant confirmation of the priest's announcement.

"There is my place, amongst these unfortunates," observed he. "You do your duty in your own way, whilst I console the fugitives, heal the wounded, and pray for those who fall."

"Gentlemen," cried Don Benito, "I assume command of my faithful tenantry, and I swear that the revolted redskins shall find my body the next barrier behind my hacienda walls."

"Courage and hope!" said Father Serafino.

Mr. Gladsden rose to go with the American in his sortie, since he had not sufficient acquaintance with Spanish to carry on conversation with the besieged, strangers all to him as well.

"Since we are still to travel in a team," said Oliver, gladdened by this arrangement, "put yourself inside a uniform like me. They've made me a brigadier-general, at the least," he added, facetiously admiring himself in a well gold-laced coat.

Whilst the Englishman was apparelling himself in much such another suit, he continued:—

"Thar hev been six-score men picked out for my band. The Don says these hev had a brush with the smokeskins, and with wild cats, and can be relied on. I don't vally them a dollar per ton myself. Hows'ever, we shan't be shot

by them in the back, as they are only trusted with long sticking poles, being rigged out as *lanceroes*—about all the *heroes* we shall find them, I opine."

"The lance is the Mexican national weapon," remarked Mr. Gladsden.

"I trust more to a dozen cow-punchers among 'em—the *vaqueros* do know how to swing the lasso, and that's a fact. Are you ready?"

"Your lieutenant is ready, captain."

"Call me 'colonel.' They are all captains in my squad, I b'lieve. You have come out a full-grown shiner. I feel like the big dog with a new brass collar—how's your feel, too?"

In plain words, the pair looked a handsome and portentous couple in their metamorphosis into Mexican officers. On going out they found Don Benito in the vestibule. He, too, had donned an old, but carefully preserved, brilliant costume of his father's as President-General, and was as the sun to a star in his superior effulgence beside them. A black servant was holding a golden salver, with a decanter and glasses rimmed with gold, at his elbow, grinning with awe and admiration at his master being so superbly caparisoned.

"A parting cup," said the haciendero, "and away! We have no time for coquetting."

"A loving cup," said Gladsden, tasting the cup, whilst Oliver refused his.

"I have head enough as it is," he remarked, in excuse. "You are dreffful good, I will say that; but I am not overly grasping for liquor when thar is a monstracious kickin'-out in prospect. After the slaying of the wild cattle, Don, then I am 'on' for my share o' the b'ar-steaks and honey."

On going out into the courtyard they at once perceived the great change. All the bonfires were beaten out, song and dance had been hushed, and the gates were closed and barricaded. In the gloom could only be distinguished the shadowy sentinels watching immoveably in the loops and gaps in the wall, and at peepholes in the palisades. As Monte-Tesoro was an eminence, these vigiladores could see fairly over the whole plain. Oliver pointed out that, to both east and west, there was a ruddy, tawny tinge.

"Villages burning. The enemy is coming on."

They crossed one immense corral, and then a still larger enclosure, wherein the hundred-and-twenty sham lancers were awaiting, each man standing by his horse, the bridle in the left hand. ready to vault into the saddle like real troopers. Two peons held a couple of very fine animals, completely harnessed and decked out, of which they presented the reins to Oliver and the Englishman.

Don Benito paused. With him were several of the elders of his guests; all wore grave expressions. Every one was armed.

"Out!" said he.

He stepped over to the stockade, scrutinising it attentively for a space, then, stooping a trifle, he bore his weight on one particular pile, whereupon, all of a sudden, a piece of the palissade opened widely, like the secret door that it was, quite noiselessly, and left a broad gangway. Oliver waved his hand, signifying "come on!" and held up three fingers, meaning "three at a time!" —sign language being universal on the border where so many tongues are intermixed. The horsemen passed him in review, three abreast, each leading his mount.

As, strangely enough, the hoofs drew no sound whatever from contact with the soil, Mr. Gladsden stooped and examined the feet of his own steed, upon which act all the enigma was solved. Like the old warsman he was, Oliver had hinted that he wanted his troop with muffled hoofs, and the delicate trick over which King Lear was ecstatic, had been performed by swathing them in strips of blanket around cotton-wool pads.

The Englishman was the very last to march forth, still shaking the hands of Don Benito and his young namesake.

"Go with God!" said the sire, fervently; "you hold our fate in your brave hands. You alone can save us."

"Keep up your spirits," was the rejoinder. "That friend of mine is no common man, and, in any case, we are going to do our best. If I never return, mind, as that scrap of writing I dashed off, records, I leave my sons especially to you as a second father, and to you, Jorge, as an elder brother."

As he mounted, and moved on to join his comrades, the secret door swung to, and all dissolution of continuity in the barrier disappeared.

There was a ditch to leap, and its sloping front to slide down. There the squadron formed. Oliver had taken to his side the oldest *tigrero*, or "vermin" eradicator of the farm, as his pilot.

"Follow!" said the American, curtly, between this hunter and Gladsden, "by threes, follow!"

CHAPTER XXI.

THE LANCERS' CHARGE.

THE forlorn hope started off at full gallop behind the trio, in a flight through the obscurity which was as lugubrious as fantastic. The sweet and sadly wan moonbeams stretched the cavaliers' shadows immeasurably over the land. Every detail of the landscape took gaunt aspects. The trees, waving white and grey beards of Spanish moss, and endless creepers in loops and knots, seemed spectres that were stationed to catch and hang the riders. No such headlong course could have been performed by any but such Mexican centaurs. It lasted over an hour, till Oliver reined in and called out—

"Pull up!"

"*Alto! alto!*" was reiterated down the line, till the column was all in quiescence on the edge of a boundless virgin forest.

"Where are we?" inquired Gladsden.

"Three leagues from the farm," answered Oliver, after the Tigrero had given him a clue. "I thought more. We have turned the main body of the insurgents, and are on their rear if they are about to fall on the big farm. I am going to cache the squad under the leaves, and go on the scout myself."

"Had you not better send one of these, who are so familiar with the country?" remonstrated the Englishman. "Your place as commander——"

"Tush! There are too many lives at stake for me to hesitate to risk mine. I kin never make by big throws onless I hev sartin news. That Old Silvano could be trusted to see all that I shall see, but he hasn't a passle (*parcelle*, particle, used in that sense by the Canadian French trappers) o' jedgment, and on jedgment depends the ha'r o' them Spanish in the hacienda. I do this scout," said he shortly. "If I know anything, I b'lieve it's scouting."

"Since things are so, go ahead."

Oliver alighted, gave some orders, delegated his authority to the Englishman with Silvano as his sub., and glided into the woods. Though there was no underbush, he was lost to the view almost instantly, so instinctively did he cover his body by the trunks.

During his absence, the Mexicans rode under the branches, and dozed in the saddle, with pickets thrown out upon all sides. Gladsden let himself be absorbed in his reflections, marvelling that after a brief period, he, the English gentleman of wealth, could be in the heart of an unexplored wood, on the borders of a desert, guarded by a band of men complete strangers not ten hours before, and exposed to being overwhelmed by a whole army of revolted slaves.

In the midst of his reverie, without any warning, a hand was abruptly slapped on his knee, and a jesting voice said—

"How many mile in'ard of the Land of Nod?"

"I was not asleep, Oliver," cried Gladsden, indignantly, as, however, he opened his eyes, and blinked them in a way that belied his denial.

The scout had returned and come right up to his side so stealthily that he had not been aroused. But the tiger-slayer had perceived him, and was smiling slightly at the practical joke which was, also, a lesson.

"Well, what's the news?"

"Things are a good deal as I s'posed," he answered. "Thar are something like three or four thousand of the critters, and sich a rabble! Very few have firearms, and, likely enough, no powder, and, if powder, no ball, so that they will top the loading with stones and gravel and blow their blamed topknots off at the first pull. The others hev come out powerful with spears, sheep-shearers divided and the blades thong'd on to poles, scythes, reaping-hooks, and all kind o' things ugly to look at of which they have made we'pins. Some 'stonishing black niggers are the head men of gangs. They are in a valley there away, on a road. They have no flankers out, and no look out, for they have no idee they mout be *attackted*."

"So we can manœuvre without any apprehension of being discovered, you mean, Ol.?"

"Jess so, gineral! one of them mountain howitzer our army promenades with could pepper 'em up sure from hyar."

"Where's their left?"

"On a little village half-a-league tharabouts."

"And their right?"

"On a little cluster of shanties that Old Silvano says is called Rancho Nuevo—nigh enough to be seen in the crack o' day from hyar."

"Can the signal rockets of the hacienda be seen from the two points you mention, and the road occupied by the mass of the rebels?"

"For why not? They are three high p'ints over the sink they are in."

"This looks promising enough."

"What! do you think to cut up three or four thousand niggers?"

"My dear Oliver, I am sure that you have your idea in your head fully matured, and that we have nothing to do but put it into execution."

"I don't know rightly about that. In any event, I am going to execute what the army men call a divarsion. If the innymy accept it as divarting, I'm satisfied. I should give it another name, myself, but thar! thar's no 'counting for tastes. Besides the bulk of the Yaguis, thar is a long straggling train, with the plunder, the fat, cowardly, and cunning, who are drinking and singing, *and* dancing like all possessed. They are coming almost dead to'rds us, and

we hev no more 'n time to receive them properly. If we turn them back, scattered, they will not be in condition to reinforce the army. That's the first article on the bill o' fare."

He beckoned the tiger-hunter to him.

"Capitano," said he, "pick out your bull-whackers, and add to them enough more to make about forty strong. Them's your *cuadrilla*, savey! Thar's a right smart sprinkle of cattle straying over the plain, bewildered, whom those barbarians hev scared, some—well, into a fever. Lasso a dozen in a herd, tie up and throw down, and send one to report progress. Meanwhile, collect a heap of fat (resinous) candle-wood. Cook away—*cuca*, cap'en!"

Silvano, delighted with his rank, and beaming with smiles to the eyebrow, soon departed with one-third or so of the little party. The rest were divided into two troops, of which the American and Gladsden took the leadership. The mufflers were removed from the hoofs as useless, and each troop was arranged in three ranks, twelve, fifteen, and eighteen in a line. Thus in order, they moved off under the trees, tall ones whose boughs only sprang out at an altitude of great degree, and parting at a silent signal, ranged themselves one each side of a track through the woodland, dignified by the title of road. They were stationed one above the other.

Two hours had passed in these dispositions.

The moon had gone down lower and more low in the heavens, till, in the end, it dropped beneath the eye-line, and opaque shadows enveloped the country and blended all objects into one mass. In the stillness of a cemetery, the two cavalcades, no longer visible to one another, awaited the forthcoming enemy.

Wild Indians detest this hour, under the influence of a belief that the soul of a warrior killed in the dark spell before dawn is doomed to dwell everlastingly in gloom; but the converted peons had had this superstition modified or obliterated altogether.

At all events, there was soon heard a confused murmur, which changed speedily into a blending of shouting, monotonous chanting, and occasional shots, while yellow flares crossed the darkest glades of the pine woods.

In twenty minutes, the vanguard of a tumultuous gathering of brown and black-skinned men, women, and youths, filled the track. They were almost naked, or merely attired in fragments of clothes to which they had never been accustomed, some bearing torches, some crucibles from mines, filled with oil and coarse wicks, and others candles of great length taken from chapels.

They were allowed to pass unchallenged.

After them the more active insurgents, drunken, frenzied, hoarse, tired with a long march, but demoniacal with their features twitching in insatiable passion, surged up in a tolerable order, brandishing and clashing their weapons, mostly of the improvised nature hinted at by the scout in his description.

All of a sudden, the harsh croak of a sandy-hill crane was audible in the thicket to the north of the road where Oliver had posted himself. Immediately the man at the side of Gladsden imitated the clatter of the beak of the same bird clearing it of the débris of a gobbled frog, by tapping his pistol-barrel on his lance-shaft. The next instant there was a rush of horses to the side of the forest track, and "*Viva Mejico!*" resounded full-throated from Oregon Ol.

"*Y Libertad!*" was the completion of the signal and war cry from the followers of Gladsden, as they, too, set spurs to their steeds.

"Mexico and liberty!"

Simultaneously, therefore, the two companies burst upon the column of Indians, cutting through and leaving a layer upon layer of pierced mortality

like in the track of a tornado. Having crossed, they made a circuit, and, coming out on the road once more, one higher up, and the other lower down the line of the previous charges, completed the surprise of the insurgents.

"Wheel, face forward in chase!" was the next command.

In half an hour, the riders came into the rendezvous agreed upon, having effectually frightened that column, and sent the surviving members reeling and flying in panic through the woods, back whence they came.

Five only of the Mexicans were missing. The wounds received were unimportant. The horses were breathed; the cavaliers allowed to congratulate themselves and their leaders. Oliver had a devoted following now, for these Mexicans are too unused to easy triumphs not to idolise the commander who gluts them with such a feast of vanity.

The collected horsemen rode off, slowly groping, to the appointed place on the open ground where Silvano and the herders were to have secured the semi-wild cattle. It was a little less dark, the false dawn, in fact, and thus Gladsden, though not so accustomed to the night marching as the rest, could see the horsemen of the Tigrero forming a wide circle; in the centre were several strange objects, writhing and beckoning to the stars. They were long-horned, thin, wiry cattle, of the breed of old which never will fatten in Mexican pastures, fleet as antelopes, savage as tigers. By dexterous casts of the lariat, they had been roped, hurled to the ground, and secured there, heels in the air. They were daunted but disdained to bow, mutely protesting by glaring eyes, full of congested blood, and twitching of the tails. A little way off, a heap of resinous wood was formed.

"Prime!" ejaculated the hunter, perceiving all this almost as clearly as by day. "Don Benny shall give you a silver medal, old coon."

He issued instructions which were forthwith carried out with delighted comprehension. The cattle were allowed to rise, but still held, half choked and much hampered with the leather ropes, whilst some active hands bound fat branches to their long horns, so that they soon assumed an apologetic appearance of stags adorned with magnificent antlers, which was amusing. Overcoming their humiliation on being anew on all fours, the beasts began to chafe. Bushes of prickly nopals were made for attaching to the animals' tails and hind quarters, like the pendent goads to the bulls in the arena.

When the cattle were finally supplied with these prickles and the wooden headgear, they were released of their trammels, and driven forward before a crescent-shaped formation of the horsemen, increasing the pace perforce in order to keep up with them. Presently, the sparks which had been applied to rags round the gummy wood, were fanned into perceptible flames. By the time these living candelabra and their remorseless goaders saw the hill of the hacienda loom up, the frightened cattle were adorned with long streamers of flame. But as they were broadened out into a line, one beside another, there was no scare to make them turn back, and their only instinctive hope was to continue their mad charge.

A deep hubbub as of bees around the hive was audible over and above the bellowing of these fiery cattle, and a vivid glare seemed to encircle the hacienda.

All at once, a yellow streak rose up in the sky, and a white star shone over the buildings and enclosures, and the multitude surging up against the pickets. Then the sky was striped luminously once more, but, this time, a rosy glare surrounded a red star.

"Now we come whooping!" shouted Oliver, participating, like even the Englishman, in the excitement of this frantic race at the heels of the terrified

bearers of the flames, forming a line of fire of continuous aspect to the Yaguis in the hollow. "Level your lance—no! draw rein! draw rein! and swerve to the left! what in thunder is that cry behind us—on the sword-hand? Great Jehosaphat! whar the Old Harry have *they* sprung up from! Apaches, by the living thingumbob! Apaches!"

In plain earnest, the "hugh-ug-hugh!" of the Apaches rang out of the pine forest, with an intonation of joy as if the sight of the rockets and the disclosures thereby of the farm which had already been their mark for massacre and pillage, had delighted them beyond control.

Then was heard, too, in a voice quite as gleeful and fiendish, the vociferation of a number of white men, in Spanish and in English.

"*Viva!* the Rustlers! *Los Ruidores* of Captain Pedrillo for ever!"

"The Rustlers!" repeated Oregon Ol., in perfect stupefaction. "Open your airth and swaller me! The 'Paché and the skunks they exchanged shots with—that shed their blood—'malgamated, by gum! take me into a gully an' bury me! I'm licked!"

Meanwhile, not having the reasons for a halt that had checked the Mexicans in the very commencement of a charge, the cattle infuriated with the falling sparks from the wood beginning to become detached from their horns, and blinded with the smarting smoke, tore down the incline into the very vale where the Yaguis were crowded. Certainly their onset would create a consternation, preventing any attention being bestowed upon Oliver's little party, as it obeyed his earnest injunction and wheeled off into an island of trees.

In ten minutes, as the dawn grew upon the scene, they could very well discern, boldly emerging from the piney woods, not only some of the stragglers of the column the Mexicans had discomfited, but two bodies of mounted men, together over their own number, whom Oliver recognised as the Apaches and the banditti, whom they had left at daggers drawn, or, more exactly, at long shots with each other.

To explain this unparalleled occurrence in border records, the union of two hostile forces in brotherly ties for active operation, we must turn back a few pages.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE PACT OF BLOOD.

BEHIND the fugitives, the rattle of dropping shots had gone on for an hour so that Oregon Oliver's prophecy of the possible duration of such skirmishing bid fair to be verified.

The Indians mode of warfare is to force a retrograde movement by the gradual concentration of fire, and at the moment a retreat is begun, whatever the cause—strategetic or from pure weakness or cowardice—a charge is made by the best warriors in a body, whooping and brandishing their weapons.

Knowing something of how resistless was such a rush, our old acquaintance Don Annibal, *alias* The Slayer of Seven, was in no humour for awaiting one.

Already, from the glimpse he had of the young Mexican girl borne away among the stampeded horses, his desire for retaliation on Don Benito had inspired him with a novel idea; he hoped, against all precedent, to unite the Apaches with him in the same purpose.

It was, indeed, our old acquaintance, the reader will see, perfectly unscrupulous by what means he obtained his ends.

The miracle to which he owed the preservation of his rascally life had been a lesson only for the time being.

When, plunging off the islet into the Gulf in order to elude the infuriated husband of Donna Dolores, the pirate was swimming for an offing, he became the aim of more than one shark. Twice he escaped being swallowed more or less in the maw of the most swift, for each time he had swerved on one side as it blindly turned back downward for the terrible bite. But, when so near the shore as to hope for full immunity from this living danger at least, one of the tintoreras, fearless of the shoaling water, flew forward like a flash of lightning, and, amid an eddy of the churning water, poor Matasiete was seized by the leg, and suffered the anguish of its being torn from half the thigh. His scream was stifled as he was dragged down, and when he arose, he was cast upon the strand. With the strength of infernal pain and the madness of despair he not only dragged himself up under cover of the mangroves, but twisted his cravat as a torniquet around the severed limb. Then he fainted away.

It was not until the morning that the pearl fishers were attracted to him by his piteous groans. They had been so generously paid by Mr. Gladsden after his securing the treasure that they took great care of the dismembered Mexican, believing him one of the brigantine crew, in which belief he took heed not to disturb them in his rare lucid moments. They rewarded themselves by stripping him and cutting off his silver buttons, and after a few weeks, changing their fishing-ground, left him in their best hut. Fever had gone, but he was as weak as a child, and for some months seemed able only to crawl about. Thus he had ample time for repentance even of so long a career of guilt.

He was penitent in his helplessness, and had such a man as Father Serafino encountered him then, he might never have recurred to his former life. But no one came near the crippled hermit but sea-otter hunters, and pearl and whale-fishers, and they were rough, unsympathetic souls, who only landed to buy, or take by force, the vegetables which he raised.

In this way, chained to the spot by his loss of limb, with the perpetual presence of the reef where that treasure had been drawn up, to embitter his thoughts and his dreams, Matasiete nursed projects of vengance, not merely against the Englishman and Don Benito, but against all human kind.

At last, nearly four years in this almost solitary existence having passed, and his little hoard of earnings by the supply of green meat to the whalers swelling out so that he feared he would be robbed, he took advantage of the offer of an officer of a British man-of-war, surveying the Gulf, to transport him to Guaymas.

People and things had changed there; the prospect of the railways connecting the port with the United States and Mexico City had galvanised it into a life he had never known before. Most of his associates had disappeared; but he found Don Stefano Garcia humbly "clerking it" in a merchant's, and very reticent about a fortnight in the chain-gang, which punishment he had undergone for some little playfulness in his banking business.

Wary, tenacious, exacting, the returned salteador fastened himself upon the clerk and black-mailed him almost daily, spending the extorted money in the

sailors' drinking-dens. At last, seeing that his Old Man of the Sea was doomed to be his destruction, Garcia made an effort, gave the robber a large sum of money once for all, and started him for the northern interior. The former rover of the Sierras had expressed a desire to resume the old life of freedom, tempered with depredation and debauchery.

Soon, indeed, to the nucleus of a few chosen scoundrels with whom he had beguiled the intervals between revels and card play in the Guaymas groggeries, with stories of the merry life on the prairies, the captain added the floating scum of Upper Sonora. But this time he did not hesitate to venture into New Mexico and run off cattle from the American settlers. Thus he acquired a wider fame than before, and on both sides of the border the One-legged Rustler had a price set on his head.

About a year before, he had an accession to his band in the person of no less than the ex-banker, Don Stefano Garcia. That estimable gentleman, from forgery to forgery, had contrived to bring the credulous foreign firm that employed him to bankruptcy, and, well supplied with funds, thus shamefully acquired, was encountered by his old associate gambling it away in the Green Ranche. They were scandalous rogues, born to travel in harness, and Garcia at once stepped into the lieutenancy of the formidable band. Too corpulent to be agile, except in the dance, in which he excelled like most Mexicans, he preferred to win by astuteness, and was no more daring when his neck was concerned than El Manco himself.

It was he who earnestly approved his superior's idea of stopping the desultory fighting and becoming friends with the Apaches. For one knew as well as the other that they were wolves whose hide would cost dear, and then be worthless.

The Apaches, as we have elsewhere remarked, are about the most ferocious and barbarous nation in the great South-West. Neither Sioux nor Pawnees attain their perfection in cruelty, and they are matchless as the Comanches in horse-stealing.

They are tyrants of the wilderness, in short, who see no life worth living without murder, pillage, torture, and conflagrations. They make no nice distinctions in attacking any beings, white, red, or mixed blood, merely out of an implacable hatred for those born beyond their pale. It is said that when other supply of foemen fall short, they will quarrel among themselves and cross knives in the council lodge itself for the sheer relish of blood-shedding.

Such were the demons to whom the Mexican Ishmael wanted to propose a temporary alliance to attack and carry by storm the hacienda of Don Benito de Bustamente.

All at once, therefore, Captain Pedrillo bid one of his men sound a bugle in imitation of the notes of the cry used by the Apaches for "cease firing!" and, immediately, one of his lieutenants, risking his life, sprang from behind a tree towards the redman, waving a blanket in a peculiar manner which kept it flat but undulating in the air, whilst he shouted "*Paz*—peace!" As a rule, such overtures are disregarded by Indians in combat, but the incertitude about their beloved chief made them accept it. Their missiles were no longer heard whistling, and, in a few minutes spent in consultation, one of the sub-chiefs leaped into the clear ground, and waved a white buffalo robe.

With bravado, in order to indicate that fear had nothing to do with this offering and assent to the truce, both parties showed themselves.

On the one side, more than a hundred red men appeared, bristling with spears and arrows held on the bow, or displaying guns and hatchets. On the other, upon an earthwork hastily thrown up with knives, the ruffians presented themselves, to the number of sixty at least enveloped in their zarapes, coiled

up to protect vital parts of the body, their heads shaded with sombreroes, or capped with skins of animals, still showing their teeth and claws; their guns and their machetes gleamed brightly. Both seemed tough morsels, and though the Indians uttered no comments on the parade, their glances among themselves expressed the same sentiment of admiration which the Mexicans muttered.

The *Alferez* and the Apache chief slowly advanced, step for step, so as to meet midway between the lines; as they came on nearer and nearer, they threw down weapon after weapon so as, at last, when they stood within arm's length, to be totally disarmed, in all appearance. No doubt both had a concealed knife, for treachery is always suspected in prairie warfare.

When they actually met, and the Mexican spokesman had repeated his mission to propose peace, on the grounds that there was no quarrel between the noble Apaches and the bandits, who were in no way connected with those infernal North American heretics who had intruded within the Rancho Verde, the Indians made a sign to his friends. Instantly, in a majestic manner, several chiefs came forward towards him, a movement imitated by Pedrillo and his sub-leaders, and soon the two groups were facing one another.

Profoundly distrustful, though no weapons were visible, both parties fully aware of the rascality of either, the Apaches nevertheless recognised that the pair of fugitives who had slain their chief after beating the Rustlers in the bar-room, and were speeding away on re-stolen horses, were no friends of the Mexicans. The proposal, therefore, that the two forces should unite in their mutual hate for the strangers, by whose deeds both suffered, was congenial. Always repulsed when they attacked the fortified houses of the rich farmers, the Indians hoped for better results if they were aided by men accustomed to fight on foot and to manage a siege.

Consequently, not ten minutes of explanation had passed before the half dozen principals were seated in a circle in the centre of the clearing before the smoking ruins of Tio Camote's luckless hostelry, with the calumet circulating for a council.

One little detail had been promptly debated and settled; apart from the bloodshed due to Mr. Gladsden and his hunter guide, five of the Apaches had been slain by Mexican bullets, while only three of the bandits had lost their lives in the skirmish. Now, inasmuch as the code "a life for a life," rules the savage practice, the Rustlers owed two lives to the Apaches, who could not, with a debt of blood unpaid, enter into alliance with the debtors.

With a shark-like grin, the worthy Captain Pedrillo removed this difficulty.

"There are four of my men, Chief Iron Shirt," said he, leaning towards the successor of Tiger Cat, "rank weeds, unruly, who have secreted unfair shares of plunder, and who contemplate desertion to go to Ures, and, perhaps, betray me and their valiant comrades to the police. I will arrange, on our march, to send them away as a detached scouting party, and your young men may take and wear their scalps at their girdles. Four scalps for two lives! applaud my generosity!"

"It is a bargain," said the Apaches, grimly enjoying the joke.

Iron Shirt was a notorious villain, having twice at least mingled with the Cheyennes and passed himself off for one of them in order to obtain from the United States agent arms and ammunition which he meant, even as he received them with protestations of lip-service, to essay upon the very official who gave them. Hence he was the man particularly to appreciate double-dealing and applaud it when he was not the dupe. He derived his singular but veritable appellation—for he is like other characters in our narrative, a figure in border

annals—not from his ever wearing a shirt of mail, but from his good fortune in escaping body wounds. He attributed it to his "medicine," but the white hunters thought him very dexterous in the use of the small shield which Indian cavalry carry, and which, while not defying a rifle ball, will fend off an arrow and stop a revolver bullet.

The pipe of council went twice around the ring, till Pedrillo spoke again from his elevated perch on the horse, the others squatting in the Indian fashion.

"My Apache brothers are great warriors," he said, "so I am wishful to prove my esteem for them by having them join me, or taking me and my band in conjunction with them," changing the form of offer on seeing the Indian wince in wounded pride, "to make complete the successful *coup* which they have already struck at the hacienda of the Treasure Hill. This time, my red brothers will return to their villages, not merely with a few horses and one pale-face girl, but with a long train of mules packed with booty and fifty women to sew their clothes, fetch water and cook their meals. The scalps are of no value to us, and they will be the Apaches' prize! as for the plunder of the rich farm, we divide it fairly between us. What does the chief say?"

Each of the Apaches answered in order of rank "it is good! The chief says we will fall on the hacienda in concert, and the plunder will be equally shared among the warriors."

The settlement of details was made whilst this favourable decision upon the preliminaries was carried to the subordinates, interestedly awaiting. General satisfaction was manifested, but the wary bandits and redmen took care not to mingle or fraternise, save with arms at hand, even where several recognised acquaintances and hailed them cordially.

There was no doubt, as happens with more important treaty-makers in Europe, each contracting party reserved in secret the right to keep none of the pledges given and to seize the spoil the moment he felt strong enough to defy the consequences of such treachery.

Meanwhile, Pedrillo called for a keg of spirits saved from the wreck of the ranche, and all drank to cement the negotiation.

Tio Camote had emerged from his retreat, and his two bar-tenders, more frightened than hurt when the roof collapsed with them, saw the unburnt stores of his tavern shared between the allies, as a commencement of their active brotherhood, without too much resentment. Forced to enlist actively among the banditti lest the rear guard of the Apaches immolated him on the smouldering ruins, where their greatest chief was inextricably buried to appease his manes, Uncle Sweet-Potato still wondered that he lived and breathed with his head thatched as nature provided. As for his assistants, they were highwaymen when out of a situation, and they entered the ranks again under Pedrillo's colours without demur.

Just before sunset, the troops, united in sentiment though divided, as it independently pursuing their respective purposes in a parallel course solely by accident, took up the ride towards Monte-Tesoro. As they had no doubt that the fugitives would be lodged, for Donna Perla's sake, in her father's house, they had no reason to try to overtake them.

The first interruption to the rapid progress of the two troops, and at the same time the first intimation they had of the revolt of the peons, was their riding into the midst of the column shattered by the sham lancers of Oregon Oliver. The severed portions of this column, like one of those fabulous serpents which had the power of healing its wounds, and joining its segments, had rallied into one mass. The leaders were hesitating on the course to take

when the Mexicans appeared, and they feared a renewal of the disaster. Fortunately, before the panic was revived, the Apaches delighted them, for they saw friends in men of their colour if not of their race. An understanding was soon arrived at. Needless to say, Pedrillo and Garcia congratulated themselves on having such allies, and the prospect of overcoming not merely the farm of Don Benito, but of many another, made their faces radiant with smiles.

Thus reinforced, the squadrons resumed the advance, followed closely by the peons, who derived much enheartenment from such warlike adherents, and, passing the detachment from Monte-Tesoro still ensconced in the pine and cedar woods, the throng poured into the valley with loud clamour echoed by the assembled rebels. This joyous uproar did not tend to reassure the beleagured Mexicans, though its cause was not perceptible.

CHAPTER XXIII.

CANNON IS BROUGHT TO BEAR.

Long and patiently had the environed garrison been awaiting the token of well-faring with the adventurers who had so daringly left that shelter.

Only in the end of the night had the sudden, and, for the moment, inexplicable apparition of the cattle on which had been imposed that fiery burden, seemed to reveal the operations of their friends.

The charge of the furious and panic-stricken creatures, whose hides were singed and smoked with a nauseating odour, was unresisted by the rebels, huddled together just out of gunshot of the farm, in the obscurity. Nevertheless, as soon as the true nature of this attack was clear, and the more active Indians had speared those animals which had not broken their necks and extinguished the flames in the ditch, the alarm calmed down. It was at this juncture that Don Benito, at the head of a hundred horsemen, galloped out of the corral and executed a terrible slashing and hewing, sweeping round amid carnage, and returning with insignificant loss. The moral effect was even greater than the material, for those of the insurgents who had previously thought nothing of rushing up to the farmhouse, and firing a shot at random amid tipsy threats and obscene imprecations, withdrew to a safe distance, and vociferated for the self-constituted leaders to evince their genius.

It was as Don Benito's troop returned within the defences that they heard, to their dismay, the well-known war-cry of the Apaches only too recently impressed on the hearing of all, and the shout of their new-found robber allies.

Of Oliver, the Englishmen, and their followers, no intelligence whatever. It is only doing the master of the farm justice, as well as his family, to say that deep distress was added to that they felt in their plight with the fear that their daring friends had all fallen into some trap of the cunning savages now foremost in [illegible]sition.

The aurora appeared, and the whole valley was revealed, full of the rebels, amongst

whom was added, as well as the sixty marauders who held Captain Pedrillo as chief, the full hundred Apaches, whose proud and domineering carriage defined them from the Yaguis born under the yoke which these had never experienced. Besides, before the heat of the day forced both besiegers and besieged to take a siesta, the already enormous concourse was swollen by the last fragments of the dispersed column finding their way thither, burdened with plunder.

All the morning had passed in rash and irregular attacks on the houses, but when they were not repulsed, the few score Indians who clambered over the stockade were cut down by the horsemen inside. Twice the Apaches had charged up to the walls, but, apparently, merely to test the watchfulness of the inmates and the range of their firearms, for they made no assault on the palissades, to pull and hack at which, or even more to alight and clamber over, would have been ignoble in a horse Indian.

Still no sign of the party that had sallied forth.

Successful in that sally of their own, the Mexican gentlemen wished to retaliate on the Apaches in particular for the insult implied in their departing from their war custom of never charging an enclosure or building of any kind. But Don Benito reminded them of the ladies who would be undefended if the horsemen were cut off, and pointed to the swarms of carousing Indians blackening the rising ground, where they had mounted to watch the farm with lustful gaze.

Little by little, after Pedrillo and his mongrels had quieted the hatred of the revolted Yaguis for any one who reminded them of the superior race, he obtained a kind of rule over their leaders, only less potent than that which they had promptly accorded the Apaches. Iron Shirt was an idol. The fact of his having but three days before swept down upon that same stronghold still defying their hosts, and snatched the proprietor's daughter and the cream of the horses merrily away, sufficed to make each of these warriors to be followed by a tag-rag of open-eyed Yaguis wherever they strayed in the wide encampment.

The food and liquor were placed under guard; the drunkards, who were plunged in stupor, were bundled into the hollows out of the way, the horse-thieves who had been racing about were pulled off the bare backs, and made to squat down and await orders for their superabundant energy to be more profitably expended. The weapons were served out anew, with some discrimination as to the bearer, so that the strong were no longer puzzled with arms for which light-handed urchins sufficed, and the youths disembarrassed of immense spears like Goliath's, and clubs that the famous giant races of the Hidden Cities could alone have swung.

The women and children, too, were pushed back, and set to cooking and other menial offices, which must have bewildered them as to the advantages of revolution.

Therefore, Oliver and his associates soon beheld the impassable barrier spread out broadly between them, and the surrounded fort became during the day more and more formidable by these evidences of discipline.

Happily their neighbourhood was not suspected. The column defeated on the previous night was composed of ignorant boors, who thought not at all by day to give an intelligible account of the lancers, who, indeed, having charged them from the ambush, were not well examined in the hurry-scurry.

"What are they waiting for?" queried Mr. Gladsden, impatiently. "Surely not for more reinforcements, when they are already a-hundred to one!"

"Thar's the answer," said the white hunter. "Yon long string of naked copperskins dragging that shining object at their tail."

"A cannon?"

"Yes! two shots o' that and thar will be a hole in the farmhouse that a herd of buffalo might traverse. Good night to our hidalgo if they get that piece trained on the house. When a bullet hits those grey blocks, hewn out of the volcano pumice-stone, it will crumble like glass, and no two ways about it. The *casa* is a case."

"And can we do nothing, absolutely nothing? Can we not even pierce that multitude, and enter among our friends and die with them."

"Well, I like a gentleman that has boys in the tender leaf still, a-talking of dying anywhar's and so airly yit. Ef you hanker to run the resk o' dying, that's a man's talk, and you can volunteer to come along with me."

"Come along with you, Oliver?"

"Yes. If that cannon fires twice into that house, I tell 'ee, thar'll be nothing but the worst kind of smashed fruit that ever figgered in an old aunty's preserve-pots. They may fire her off once, but not twice, if I hev' the right sort of luck in my idee. I think this sport hes gone quite far enough."

By this time Mr. Gladsden had become reconciled to Oliver having "idees."

"I am with you," he simply said, "and the more desperate the enterprise, the better it bids to quiet my blood, which is at boiling point."

"You'll hev' all the despiritness you want," answered the Oregonian.

Then, turning to the Mexicans, who had waited the conclusion of their dialogue restlessly, he continued:

"Whar's them sky-rockets? hand 'em here, Silvano. Keep close as you hev' done all along. When you see those fireworks cavorting (curvetting) around that big camp right smart, you sail in down the hill and stick every red nigger till you are right up to the house, if your heart backs your breast bone so far. And mark! your government offers two hundred and fifty dollars for Injin scalps, and you kin have my share this trip, and welkim!"

His speech was received with enthusiasm, notably the peroration. He illustrated his intention to make scalps by throwing off his uniform coat, cutting his shirt-sleeves off at the shoulder, and removing the spurs which he had donned for the ride. Then he took up a handful of live-oak leaves, bruised them, and dyed his bared arms, neck and face with the juice to a brown hue. At his suggestion, the Englishman left his arms free and disguised his fairness of hue in the same manner.

"Do you see that rising ground up which they are toiling with that big gun? That's our aim. Come on!"

"In the midst of them?"

"Plum centre."

Which was all the reply the query elicited.

The Yaguis occupied the further side of a long valley, almost in an unbroken mass. Those who elsewhere completed an environment of the hacienda were in groups, which changed position at fancy, and were less warlike than the main body. The rear was left to a natural guard; the inaccessibility of the hill, where, too, a barranca, or deep chasm, with perpendicular sides, caused by a torrent suddenly cutting its way to a subterranean reservoir, almost at right angles, divided the incline.

The watch, as is common with a sudden gathering, was nobody's business.

The Apaches and the Mexican half-breeds, self-constituted chiefs, were now scattered among the Yaguis, teaching the handling of weapons and promising them all manner of delights when the farm should be captured.

Oregon Ol. and his associate struck from the wood which concealed their companions, away at first from the valley, but on arriving fairly upon the north side, they advanced parallel with its crest, every now and then perceiving a flag waving on top of the hacienda. The ground was so rough that they had alternations of leaps and creeps over obstacles of which the hunter made light, but which delayed the Englishman. On reaching the gorge, the former paused to admit of the other coming up.

"Thar's our route," said the hunter, pointing down into this open tunnel and along its incline upward, "We kin settle down to a long scramble, but all the

way thar'll be no alarms; those rum-soakers haven't a good eye among the heap."

"That is the more gratifying, as there are enough of them to convert us into a pair of pin-cushions with their arrows."

Nevertheless, he could not help a shiver of repugnance to adventuring at such a risk.

"I do not say we could do it by night, for down thar the twilight allers dwells, save whar the line of sun-glare travels at the bottom. But thar is nō other road."

They spent a few moments in further disguise, removing or staining with red oxides every part of their remaining attire and exposed skin which would not favour the supposition to a chance observer that they were Indians floundering in the abyss where they had blundered during intoxication. They were armed only with knives and revolvers, but each carried one of the rockets.

They proceeded to descend the steep up and down side with all the precaution requisite. Difficult was not the word for their task, for none but a maniac or a lover or such as these staking all on the chance of being infinite service to their fellows, would have hazarded themselves.

The descent was a series of slides, checked by dwarf shrubs and rocks of all imaginable forms, cut, ground, polished, jagged by the water and sand; now and then, without any warnings, there were cracks and holes three or four yards wide at the remote bottom of which was to be heard a melancholy soughing and roaring as of raging demons or oppressed souls. Out of several, a thick, noisome, warm vapour sluggishly oozed. Once, when they had hardly succeeded in crossing a part of which the rim was of crumbling sand, Oliver had made a remark on the judiciousness of his comrade awaiting him there, but the answer was so stern and impregnated with such resolution that he never again remonstrated.

At last the centre of the trough was attained.

But here the chaos of sand, shrubs, and rocks, became next to inextricable, and to proceed up through the hindrances, varying each instant in material but not in degree, would have been pronounced simply preposterous by the most exacting.

Nevertheless, Oliver was a man whom nothing could stop in his purpose, for he twined in and out, crawled as supple as a serpent, thought nothing of his hands and knees exposed to the adamantine sands and the harsh cat-claw bushes that would have frightened the half-naked savages, and if oftimes he was compelled to retrace his steps when he had ventured into a non-egress, it was only the better to resume his unwearied way.

"I'm no hog," growled he once, when he paused to suck a more than usually deep briar scratch which he believed poisonous, "and I know when I hev' my fill o' sich 'snaking,' but it's got to be did. Besides," looking up from the semi-obscurity to the top of the gorge where the sky glowed the more gorgeously by contrast, "night must not catch us no farther up, and agen," sniffing like an old sailor, "ain't thar rain in the air?"

"I am stifled with the sulphur reeking out of these cracks," returned his companion; "on this roof of Old Nick's kitchen, I really am not aware I have a nose upon me for weather-scenting."

Oliver grunted as a kind of quiet laugh, and on he scrambled.

At the same time that one would have deemed all his faculties absorbed in picking the course and caring for his own safety, the hunter found time, not merely to caution his comrade, but to intervene at moments of peril. This constant attention in safe-keeping once even almost led to his losing his life or limbs, for in choosing for himself the wider part of a crack, the edge gave way all together, and but for Gladsden clutching by the side, with a little fold of the skin, too, in the grasp, the hunter must have fallen within the crust.

"Thank'ee, pard.!" observed the guide, wincing comically; "that time you grabbed flesh and ha'r. A little more of sich a grip, an' you'd hev' had to leave me behind, sot here; on my hind legs, a-howling!"

At last, after nearly twice the three hours assigned too rashly for the whole effort had been spent in scaling the anfractuosities at which a mountain sheep would have baulked, they had at all events ascended the barranca and were under the centre of the part of the hill where the Yaguis had dragged an old forty-pounder, brought over by the conquerors, and for long rusting at some farm in the neighbourhood. Their rejoicing at the accomplishment of their work coincided so closely with that of the two white men that the latter smiled to be so indirectly cheered.

Stopping to take breath, they looked back with relief and pride at the horrible gulfy path which they had overcome, darkening into blackness with the failing light.

Whilst the cannon was placed on some logs so that it could be trained on the hacienda, to the level of which this hill almost rose, the Yaguis were silent, so interested were they in the operation superintended by Lieutenant Garcia, inflated into abnormal pomposity by becoming the cynosure.

"Up!" said Oliver in this silence.

They had the abrupt side to climb when they would be beside the amateur artillerists. After what they had overcome this affair was merely one of time. The brink of the barranca was armed by stony mounds and the wrecks of half-a-dozen pines of the giant species, which must have been an imposing sight for miles around before the lightning or the tempest shattered them. Ensconced in this natural barricade, not more than three hundred feet from the nearest of the foe, they could easily take the repose they deserved, whilst studying the scene and the actors.

On their front, to the right, the hacienda and its corrals, into which they could gaze across the gully; farther away the forest where the Mexican detachment lay. Beside them, the hill covered with the insurgents, and more and still more of them in the vales. Disseminated thus, they seemed a veritable swarm of locusts, such as covers the plains of Arizona and Colorado.

They recognised without difficulty Captain Pedrillo on his horse, with his wooden leg sticking out and twitching free of the stirrup; the Apache chiefs, knowing nothing about ordnance, left the Mexicans to manage the loading of the cannon with blasting powder. A pile of the powder-cans, some partly open and some altogether stove in and lid'ess, with all the carelessness of the inexperienced, stood near the piece on its wooden frame; at that distance the Englishmen could even see the brand on the tins of the sun in glory of the Rayo del Sol Mining Company, from the works of which, by Regulus Pueblo, they had been taken by its truant ore-carriers.

Darkness fell, deeper than usually, which confirmed Oliver in his forecast as to a tempest approaching, but the peons worked on at the clumsy pedestal of the cannon by the flare of torches.

Seeing that the piece would surely be in place, Captain Pedrillo, Iron Shirt, and the Apache sub-chiefs went into a large tent on the brow of the hill. It was open on the face towards the hacienda above, and consequently they were no longer visible to the two adventurers, who could see only the guard of Indians at the same point.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE UNWILLING VOLUNTEER.

It had fallen a very black night, we say. Not a star peeped out among the heavy clouds grazing the tree-tops and rim of the bowl in the centre of which Monte-Tesore flaunted its defiant colours. In the northward, long peals of thunder rolled without any lightning being visible.

Whether from the effect of the atmosphere, or by the presentiment of the assault by the multitude of besiegers being imminent, a kind of gloom seemed to reign in the hacienda; the courts were deserted, the sentries were almost unseen, and their "all's well" but feebly re-echoed along the barriers. Not one light sparkled at an aperture to cheer the two watchers on the hill in the heart of the hostile camp.

On the other hand, without, at fires kindled far enough away not to expose the crowds encircling them to gunshot, the rebels noisily kept holiday, shouting and cheering and singing.

In the tent, formed of curtains and carpets thrown over supports of tree-stems, erected with all the ingenuity of a people expert by tradition in hut-building, the three chiefs of the allied foes of Sonora were in conference.

Each had already gained a hold on the masses,—the Apache by having shown with his handful of warriors that the Mexicans could be bearded in their houses; the Mexican by his notorious feud with the farmer gentry; and Juan, the Yagui, by having accumulated these hordes, after having excited them to throw off the yoke.

Furthermore, the latter had brought the cannon and suggested its employment against the farm-building; and Iron Shirt had distinguished himself in all the charges up to the very pickets, harassing the Mexicans till they were no doubt weary from want of rest.

All the tendency of their conversation was towards taunting the one-legged robber-chieftain for his backwardness in the attack.

Suddenly the Mexican, who had borne the inuendoes with deep philosophy, as he smoked a cigarette or two, lifted his head, and listening, said:

"I know that step! It is my spy's! Now, perhaps, I shall show you what manner of man is el Manco."

There was a slight exchange of questions and answers between the guards of the tent, and then the three leaders beheld a dark figure's outlines against the sky.

It was a peon, apparently.

"Speak," said Captain Pedrillo, as the Indian bowed low, "we three are one to hear you."

"Your excellency," began the slave in a low, clear voice, eking out his story with signs, which were clearer to the comprehension of Iron Shirt than his speech, "I have penetrated the farm even to the gardens."

"Ah!" cried the peon leader and the robber in a breath, whilst the Apache's eyes gleamed transiently and gleefully.

"I have found a secret gate in the palissade. One or two men, even mounted ones, would not be remarked, for the watches are worn out by the day's guard. In truth, a mounted man would be thought, once within the corral, one of their officers. Thence, one can ride into the garden where the ladies take the air. I am sure," added he, with ferocity, "that if we had half-a-dozen of us in their midst, while our brothers attacked the hacienda on all sides, that the defenders would be so distracted by their shrieks and the war-whoops that we would master the place in a twinkling."

"You hear?" said the Mexican, complacently. "We might have hammered our fists sore on the gate and made no headway. But thanks to my emissary, Juan——"

"Diego —."

"Diego, then; we can have the cursed proprietors at a disadvantage. He shall lead a small force into the heart of the fortress during this night. Then let the sound of our cannon, hurling its huge balls into the doomed dwelling, be their signal to seize the women enjoying the shade and shelter, and ours to assail the same from every quarter."

The Apache was not enthusiastic, and the peon was suspicious.

"He was a servant there," explained Captain Pedrillo, hastily, noticing how little his agent and his project were approved. "Don Benito had him flogged for some peccadillo, and he has loved him, thirsted to show his love for the family ever since."

The rebel leader grinned at the sarcasm; it opened an old sore.

"That is different," said he. "Diego, you are welcome now; and yet," he went on, "Diego is Indian, yes; peon, yes; but Yagui, no!"

"It is true, I am not a Yagui," answered the other, with some pride, "but I am a Mayo. My people hunted over this ground, hither and thither, from the sea to the Aztec's land, from the Smoking Mountain to the Pimas' cornfields; but now, their bow is broken, their gold gilds the spurs of the Spaniard. Diego stands alone; the last of the Mayos is the pointing-dog of the Yaguis, the Apaches, and the Foe-to-all-men."

He locked his hands, and, bowing, remained like a statue before the trio.

"Good!" said the Apache, "we are born diverse, but hatred makes us brothers. I will bring a chosen band to the secret gate."

"And I," said the peon leader, "will set my brothers on the alert to attack the farm at every point."

"And I will manage the great gun," said Pedrillo, pleased at how patly things were falling. "Here upon the hill——"

"Out of shot?" sneered Juan. "No! your Mexicans can manage the cannon. You are the gentleman to handle the ladies with gloves; you, captain, will accompany the spy."

"But I cannot move out of the saddle."

"But you heard Diego say a mounted man will be taken for one of their own officers——"

"Still——"

"It is well," interrupted Iron Shirt; "my brother the Yagui prepares to hurl his brothers on the pickets, whilst I and mine await at the gate. The captain will go with the Mayo, and when the big gun is fired, we all set to our work. It is spoken, the council is broken up."

He rose. The Yagui bowed, accustomed already to yield immediately to the superior ever-free Indian, and the Mexican concealed his disgust at being overruled.

There was a brief silence, during which Diego quitted the tent, though remaining still in view, just outside, apparently regarding the stronghold and not listening to the chiefs.

The storm was fast approaching, for the lightning was visible, and the thunder was borne on gusts which gave a damp feeling, though no rain had fallen yet.

"Just the night for a surprise," remarked the Yagui, assuming to the best of his ability the air of one experienced in warfare.

"It is good," added the Apache, examining his weapons, conscientiously.

The Mexican looked from one to the other with diminishing hesitation.

"Good or not," said he, abruptly, "I see no harm in our taking precautions."

The Apache paid no attention; he was fine-edging his knife on a small piece of Arkansas whetstone which he carried in a satchel at his side among other little tools and his talismans. The Yagui, however, looked over at the speaker inquiringly.

"I want a few of my men to come with me. They know my ways—I know theirs."

Juan consulted Iron Shirt with a glance and then nodded carelessly.

"Let me have Garcia before me, my alferez."

He stepped to the opening, and blew a silver whistle hanging by a chain of the same metal around his long neck. Presently, the Mexican whom he thus summoned came striding to his commander.

"Stefano," said the latter, loudly enough for the others to hear, "I believe you are devoted to me?"

"I ought to be," was the answer, "for I should have been hanged three months ago but for your honour plucking me out of the calaboose of Concha Village. Since then I have been your trustiest lieutenant, I take it."

"You have. Well, I am going on a forlorn hope, but a brave man thinks nothing of risking his life when the reward is great. I am going almost alone into the hacienda, with our Apache brothers, under the guidance of our faithful peon yonder."

"Ah!" cried the ex-banker, incredulously.

"I shall be in the heart of the fortalice, in the gardens, where the ladies recreate out of the reach of arrows, but not safe from the ball from our cannon. Now, as a gallant gentleman, Stefano, do not, in aiming at the house, fling your ball in among the dames."

"I won't, captain, all the less likely, as I mean to aim at the building low down. The ball will play prettily with the foundation stone and the don's imported Spanish wines—more the pity."

"Then, if the ladies are safe," began the Mexican, relieved partly of his fears, "there's no more to be said."

"The house is my mark, rest tranquil, your excellency."

"Very well," sighed Pedrillo, drawing his false leg out of the hole which he had deeply drilled in the earth in his agitation. "I no longer have any uneasiness. Now, let me have six men for my expedition."

"You can have six rogues, who will go anywhere under the leadership of La Chupa——"

"Stay; no, I would rather have your kinsman, Zagal, to be at their head."

"My cousin? This is a grievous slur on a caballero to choose his kinsman as a kind of hostage, but 'tis war time and we must act like warriors. Zagal shall accompany you, captain, as you please. Have no fear that I shall scalp him with a cannon shot," said Garcia with a laugh. "He owes me forty odd dollars, to be paid out of our plunder of the hacienda. Your honour is safe next him."

This arrangement completed, the captain had to go forth. He looked to a brace of revolvers in his sword-belt, to the sabre that it should play freely, put on a *poncho*, lined with india-rubber against the rain, and hobbled altogether from the tent. The peon guide awaited him, and lent him his shoulder on his lame side till he had mounted his horse. Already the Indians, to the number of fifty, were in the saddle; they had removed everything of a light colour or that glittered, and had chosen whole-coloured horses with a dark skin.

"Hasten down the hill," said Pedrillo, as his half-a-dozen rogues galloped up into the troop, "the storm will be on us in ten minutes, confound it! and all nocturnal excursions!"

Indeed, they were hardly out of the hollow, and mounting the slope which gradually brought them to the level of the farmhouse, before they were deluged with rain. Fortunately the lightning was flashing on the other side of the pine forest, where the detachment from the besieged were gladly sheltering themselves, and no glimmer fell upon the cavalcade. The Apaches' bodies cast off the wet like ducks' plumage, whilst the thick blankets of the Mexicans were as serviceable as the chief salteador's waterproof.

The ditch was brimming with water, so much so as to be on the overflow at one

or two places where the peons had wantonly breached it, and the rippling of the waste water was quite noisy. Two of the Indians swam the moat as easily as beavers, plied their hatchets dexterously in the mud till a shelving landing-place was formed, and there the troop executed a passage. To ride up to the very stockade, of which the height prevented even a horseman being perceived from the house, though not from a sentinel on the enclosure, was no difficult task.

All remained as gloomy as silent. Beyond doubt, the falling rain had pelted the watchmen into nooks.

Suddenly three figures started up under the very heads of the foremost horses.

"Stay," said Diego, "they are peons. Yagui?"

"Yagui!" was the answer.

"What news?"

"Nothing."

"Where is the gate I found, and which I cannot surely lay my hand upon now in the wet?"

"Here."

CHAPTER XXV.

THE LOYALTY OF THE APACHE.

'THIS is the gate," said the Mayo Indian, touching the palissades. "See, it moves at a pressure. Now, who comes?"

The captain shuddered, he knew not why, as the secret piece in the stockade yawned ajar.

"We await," said Iron Shirt, laconically, pointing to his followers, who were huddling up against the long wall, and taking advantage of every irregularity in its line.

"You await? Here?" cried the robber, astounded, "you never mean to say you are not going to accompany me now that you see the way is unimpeded?"

"Here we await," replied the Apache, firmly, "till we hear the war-cry of the Foe-to-all-Men. When the Legless Man sends up the whoop for reinforcements, the Apaches will dash in and succour him."

"But, chief——"

"The chief has spoken, and his tongue is tired of talk."

"Well, if it is no avail remonstrating with the great warrior," replied Pedrillo, grumbling to himself, "hang him for an obstinate red devil! On, come on," he added, to his own five men and their corporal, as reluctant as himself, on seeing the Apaches leave them to their own valour, and he pushed them before him roughly with his horse's shoulder.

The Mexicans had all dismounted, not having his reason for keeping in the saddle, and noiselessly stole in at the opening after the red-skinned pilot.

The little party were within the corral.

"To mark the place of this gate," said the salteador, "two of you remain here."

"Good," said Diego, who pushed the gate shut, whereupon so neatly was it contrived that, particularly in such absence of light, the joining place of the edges was not perceptible.

"Deuce take you—what's that for?" cried the robber, suspiciously.

"Not to arouse observations if a keen eye follows the line of the fences," replied the Mayo. "Your men plainly denote the spot, if we must retreat."

"That is true," rejoined the valiant captain, but not in a tone of assurance, whilst his men looked downhearted at one another, and enviously at the couple left behind.

However, with the Apaches at hand, a retreat without striking a blow would probably have caused a dispute which would have imperilled their unholy alliance; and had as the prospect was, at least the Mexicans might show a fellow-countryman quarter, while the Indians would surely not spare the turncoat whites.

After all, so far the smoothness of the entry promised fairly, and to have to do with twenty gentlewomen was no formidable matter.

"On!" said he, impatiently, twitching up his wooden leg so that it seemed to point the way.

They crossed the enclosure, and reached the second wall without a challenge, over a ground eight inches deep in water, in the depressions caused by horses' hoofs, and rude cart wheels.

Diego scrambled up the pickets like a cat. He almost instantly dropped down, and said, in an ordinary tone—

"Not a head along the wall far or near."

"They have drawn in their sentries," said Zagal, a quick-eyed, nimble half-breed, "or they have fallen back under the verandah for protection. It's quite right of them. I would not put a dog out this weather."

"Bah," returned the captain, eager to believe the coast was clear of sharpshooters, and well defended by his waterproof, "war-dogs should disregard the rain. As I cannot leap my horse over those pikes, suppose you find the gate."

The Mayo had already groped along the corral, and unexpectedly the gate was opened by him. With a few strokes of his knife he had cut the raw hide thongs that served as fastenings and were relaxed by the wet.

"Let two of you stay here," said Pedrillo, before following the others through.

Then he pushed his horse between the main post and the gate held half open by Diego.

He and his three trusty rogues were before the house, which loomed up large at the end of the long, wide enclosure.

The thunder was dying away, and the swishing of the rain in the puddles and against the palissades seemed lessening in intensity. Certainly, the sentries were removed, and the building was silent as a mausoleum.

Nevertheless, they durst not directly cross the open spaces, but skirted the stockade until they could move forward in the cover of outbuildings which favoured a zigzag advance.

In this manner they attained a brick wall, where Diego halted them with his uplifted hand.

"The garden," he whispered.

By all these movements an hour and a half had elapsed. They were so close to the house that the windows were seen to be outlined here and there by the glow around the edges of the sashes and, through insect protectors of gauze, from subdued lights within.

All seemed asleep.

"We might have taken the hacienda," observed Captain Pedrillo, vexedly. "But those poltroon redskins hung back."

"Nay," replied the Mayo, shaking his head. "They are on their guard within, never fear. There is only one weak point, and that I am showing to your honour."

With his knife, the Indian's tool of all work, he severed the wooden bolt of a door in the wall, and burst it open from a hasp within by a steady pressure of the shoulder. He drew on one side, after pushing it open, in respect. The glimpse

within was purely of a black den where wet vines and nodding plants glistened dully of the pouring shower.

"Thank you," said the captain, "for myself and band. But just you go in and scout about first. So far we have done a deed of daring; to run our heads into the wolf's very jaws smacks of rashness."

Diego plunged into the doorway in a cautious manner.

"What do you think of all this, Zagal?" inquired the Mexican chief quickly.

"That we ought to have carried fifty pounds of that blasting powder each man, and we could have blown the hacienda into mud-pies! What a chance to miss!"

"Very true," said the captain, pretending to see the venture in the same way. "I wish we had the affair to begin all over again: I should act in a very different way."

In the next instant the Indian reappeared.

"The garden is deserted. Not so much as a horned owl drowned out of its nest," he said.

"Ah!" sighed Pedrillo, like a martyr; "let us go on. Only one of you remain at this post, his foot in the doorway, holding the door close, but not letting it shut, on his life."

The horseman, the Indian, and the two other Mexicans then invaded the garden. Pedrillo shook with eager heroism so that his steed participated in the tremor. It was a night, and the garden a place to inspire terror, even in the breast least timid, one must grant.

The garden was a maze designed after some labyrinth in a Spanish palace grounds, and rendered more bewildering by the luxuriant growth of the plants and shrubbery chosen to form the inter-volutions.

It angered El Manco very much that Zagal would not regard the affair with his own eyes, but persisted in cherishing the plan.

"What a splendid spot for an ambush," said he. "The keenest eye cannot perceive any of us, even your excellency on the horse's back."

"So be it," answered the captain testily. "Take your nestling places, then, at least till after this clearing-off shower. What a swamping! 'Sdeath of my life! I do not blame the men of Don Benito for keeping indoors."

Diego pointed out a species of alcove of verdure into which he backed his horse, equally grateful for shelter in the worst torrent of all that had fallen.

Diego, grinning and showing shark teeth, stood at the mouth of this bay, lashed by the swinging vines and lianas, eyeing the sky and listening attentively to all sounds, quiet as a statue.

After that waterspout, the tempest fled with haste, sweeping away all the gloomy clouds.

Out of the sky of deep blue suddenly sparkled a myriad of stars. The moon, too, presented a pale face in a watery vapour, which gave an effect of mirage as if it had a misty partner and the two were slowly dancing.

The atmosphere became of singular limpidity, and the smallest leaves and the flower-cups so tiny that only the humming-birds' bills could pierce their hollow, were discernible at a distance. Thousands of gnats and musquitoes swarmed out of their retreats and played in the moonlight like motes in the solar beams. The earth began to smoke with vapour, and the flowers exhaled oppressive wealth of perfumes.

The captain, galvanised by the fresh morning breeze, for it must have been about three o'clock, was about to call his men for a consultation, when on each side of him he felt a figure rise, and in each of his leather cheeks was pressed the muzzle of a pistol. At the same time, his arms were grasped and pressed down by his sides. Another pair of hands seized each leg, real and fictitious, and lifting him up, he was held in the air like a puppet, whilst the traitorous Diego drew the horse out from under him. Then his unknown seizers lowered him to the ground, in the

softness of which his stump was deeply embedded, and a low but firm voice muttered in his ear:

"No nonsense, or you are a dead man before being justly hanged!"

Some stifled oaths and cries, at the same time as a scuffle, betokened that his followers were being mastered in the like manner. Only the horrid grating of a knife along a bone, and a deep groan or two proved that Zagal or another had offered such a manful resistance as their captain well heeded not to attempt.

Two men took the salteador between them, bending like a sack of grain, and carried him, heels first, in that ignominious attitude, through the maze, which was no puzzle to them, into the house over the porch and in at a window from the verandah. The room into which he was transported was that where Mr. Gladsden had been entertained. Don Benito, his son, and another gentleman, chiefs of the defensive operations, were there seated. Two lamps, burning low, were quickly turned up on the arrival of the prisoner, evidently expected. His carriers were two Mexicans of strong build, armed to the teeth, who set him in an armchair, confronting their master, and stood, one each side of him, pistols still in hand.

For a moment Don Benito and his captive looked at one another. Hatred and anguish at having been thus placed before his old enemy gave the former Don Annibal the impudence not to quail.

"My so-called captain," said the haciendero, "you are my prisoner."

"By the cursedest treachery," returned Pedrillo, bitterly and really burning with indignation.

"Which trick has only prevented you attempting a more shameful deed against women and children of your own race—a race that repudiates such as you, though."

"I am a volunteer frontier guard," rejoined the free-lance, still more impudently. "If it were not for my band doing soldierly duty along the border, your houses, your sheep, your cattle, your families would not be safe."

"Trash!" returned Don Benito. "You are an ally of the redskin murderers, not their repressor."

"This is the first time I have ever been hand in hand with them," went on Pedrillo, pleading direct to the third Mexican whom he knew to be a rich proprietor. 'They have forced me to act with them. When one is among wolves, he must howl with them."

"A wolf howls with wolves, but a dog dies battling with them," retorted Senyor Bustamente.

Diego entered the room at this juncture.

"Well?" demanded the haciendero.

"One dead with his own knife in his heart; one wounded with a pistol-shot which went off in the folds of his blanket, the other safe and sound," reported the false guide.

"This Indian will bear me out that I entered on the mad enterprise reluctantly," began the bandolero in a less firm voice.

"This Indian Diego knows you of old, and I advise you not to require a character from him. In the time when you resumed your old craft of piracy and attacked me in the Gulf, this Indian and his father scuttled your steamer, effectually executing that diversion which prevented your crew from overwhelming my brave friend."

Captain Pedrillo rewarded the Mayo with a malignant look. If he had only have suspected this before when he had him in his camp. Whilst he ground his teeth and jerked his stump nervously, his judge pursued:

"I have had you decoyed out of your forces that the savages may not have the benefit of your cultured cunning. You deserve death a hundred fold for warring against Mexico, and that death should be the traitor's—that by the ignoble rope. But

I have no hangman's noose here; you are going to be honoured with the soldier's fate—you shall only be shot!"

"Beware!" said Pedrillo, stoutly, though his heart sank; "this house is surrounded by a multitude like the waves of a sea. When the assault is made for which the signal is the crushing shot of an enormous cannon being levelled hereon under cover of the stormy darkness, you will be inundated by the sands of a desert storm. My murder will be avenged on each of you, your wives, your daughters and your sons and servants, over and over again!"

"Thanks for the caution, but we mean to sell our lives and our dear ones' honour most dearly. Meanwhile, you will be shot. Take the carrion hence to the room where Father Serafino will try to soften his hard heart, and then lead him out to execution."

The cold, stern sentence annihilated the salteador's insolence. His hands dropped and hung each side of the armchair, whilst he murmured in deep terror.

"You have robbed me before of my ship, of my bravest men, and now would have my blood! It is of evil omen to you!"

He trembled, and his eyes seemed to be moistened; clearly his ferocious soul was weakening, and fear had stricken him to the heart. The two peons bore him away between them, like an automatic figure, of which the limbs of flesh and bone were no more vivified than that of wood. In this supine, hopeless state, the priest could in no way prevail on him. Half-an-hour was entirely wasted in unavailing pleading. Then came the guard to carry out the prostrated miscreant to meet his doom at the dawn of that day when he anticipated he should have the farm at his mercy

Without resistance, ceasing to tremble but still a weakling, the once-dreaded bandit allowed himself to be propped up against the palissade. By the morn's early light his figure, firmly set by his wooden leg being fixed in the wet ground, his back against the wood, his head on one shoulder, his eyes closed, his white lips muttering nothing intelligible, could all be seen by the Indians and his followers upon the other eminence. Thence, too, could be discerned the firing party of peons, five in number, ranged at a few paces, before Don Benito, who was to give the word. The miserable aspect of the lame man, like a buzzard with a broken and trailing wing, pitiable despite its loathsomeness, made the Mexican see that he was judicious in not hanging the robber; the sight of the single leg twitching in the death struggle in air would have appealed to humanity, and Pedrillo el Manco would become an exalted legend among the reprobates of the province.

All was ready.

A gleam of sunlight irradiated the corral, and glistened on the wet pickets, and yellowed the waxen face of the wretch condemned to death.

Don Benito looked at the five gun-barrels just catching the sunbeam, and was about to give the order for them to fire, when a totally unforeshadowed interposition occurred.

When, during the night, the Apachas at the secret gate had heard the scuffle within the enclosure, which denoted how the Mexicans had fallen on the unfortunate companions of Pedrillo, they were off at full speed without delay, clearing the moat at a tremendous bound. Two of the robbers succeeded in passing through the postern, but were overtaken and cut down on the brink of the ditch. After that, during the trial of Captain Pedrillo, the environs of the hacienda had not been disturbed. At the present moment all eyes within the corral were directed on the culprit so soon to expiate his crimes. Nevertheless, the sentries would not have permitted a numerous body of enemies to have approached unchallenged. But it was another matter as regarded a solitary Apache, who, now hanging by the side of his war pony, now leading it, now crawling on alone before, and whistling softly for it to join him, came up to the palissade totally unseen and unexpected. In fact,

how could the two hundred peons and Mexicans in the farm-enclosure fear anything from a solitary red man?

Thus had Iron Shirt, for it was the chief who devoted himself to a desperate enterprise, reached the outside of the stockade just where the bullets, sure to perforate the wood around the death-awaiting bandolero, would salute the unsuspected bystander painfully. The woodwork rose some fourteen feet high, effectually masking him and his equally as steadily moving steed. He stopped the latter, vaulted on his back like a circus-rider, stood up, and all of a sudden the startled Mexicans beheld the plumed head, the black-painted face, and the long arm of the Apache above the pointed posts, just over the cowering bandit's form.

"Fire!" cried Don Benito.

But even as he spoke the red arm was extended downwards, the steel-like fingers clutched the shoulder of Captain Pedrillo, and he was lifted up with what was a prodigious expenditure of force, albeit he was the lighter by a limb than most men, clear of the low aim of the peons. Then, caught in both arms of the savage, standing on his horse, the Mexican was transferred to the farther side of the barricade.

It was the deed of an instant, this snatching aloof of the victim.

Fifty eager men, shaking off their stupefaction, sprang to the stockade, and leaping upon shelves, placed there for the purpose, fired on the disappearing pony, burdened with the double charge, but gallantly bounding away.

At the same time, to draw off a second volley from their gallant chief, a number of Apaches, and the rebels who ran up the incline as far as the verge of the ditch, shot arrows and bullets into the corral. The Mexicans were compelled to drop down and retire.

True to the chivalric creed that a chief's scalp is to be rescued at any cost, Iron Shirt had saved his brother commander.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE HARVEST OF THE KNIFE.

With similar fortitude, the American and his associate had resisted the rain in the best shelter the rocks afforded. At least, the relentless downpour had prevented any completion of the mounting of the piece, and it was not till full day, after the Apache chief had triumphantly brought the Mexican back to the encampment, amid the *vivas* of the rebels, that Garcia's cannoneers had obtained the fitting elevation.

This done, the robber lieutenant applied his cigar, after having puffed it into active incandescence, to the piece of slow match stuck in the rusty touchhole, and embedded there with ample powder to ensure the ignition.

Gladsden gave the hunter an appealing look, but the latter's face was immobile as a statue's. He had, therefore, to control his throbbing heart as best he might, whilst the match spluttered and hissed like a serpent, and lessened in length. All eyes were fastened upon the farmhouse, and the unutterably deep silence which pervaded the thousands of enemies to the beset handful was most impressive.

Hardly had a few seconds, which seemed minutes to all concerned, fled away, than the spark reached the powder; there was a faint flash, then a much brighter

and broader one, and with a gush of flame, as at the opening of an iron furnace-door, the old gun awoke from its centuries' repose, with the roar of a menagerie lion that was at last released from captivity.

Through the rolling smoke the huge round stone, which had been chosen for bullet, sped noisily in an arc of trajectory which gave Senyor Stefano much credit, and crashed into the farmhouse a little below the roof-edge, knocking three little bits of windows into one broad gap.

An immense shout of savage joy hailed this result, and even the bystanders, injured by the splinters of the logs, smashed by the recoil of the gun, forgot their hurts in the success.

Gladsden had leaned forward out of the covert, and seemed on the verge of seeking to avenge this hurling of death in amid the Mexican's home; but the American placed both hands on his shoulders, and dragged him back and downwards.

"Wait!" said he, grimly. "Before they fire a second ball, our turn to play comes in. They will leave powder round loose, will they? I'll show 'em! You jes' hold your hosses—I'll show 'em to shoot at women and children."

Indeed, there was plenty of time for the planning and execution of a counter-measure, for the remounting of the forty-pounder, though cheerfully, even merrily, performed, was a lengthy labour.

Mr. Gladsden, chafing at his impotence, fixed his eyes on the farmhouse, where the great hole seemed to reproach him for this inaction. There did appear at its edges what seemed men at that distance, but the Yaguis immediately showered stones and darts on these repairers, who shortly retired.

The unfortunate victims of the bombardment would have no choice but to put the women in the cellars and perish in the ruins, or sally out at a disadvantage when the cannon rendered the place quite untenable.

In the meantime, Oliver, calculating with much exactitude the time required by the Mexicans and their assistants to replace the gun on its rests, was splitting a length of old pine in halves; this done, he hollowed out the centre with his knife, and soon had a pair of troughs which served very fairly as rocket-tubes. As soon as he had finished, his jogging the elbow of the Englishman for him to look, set the latter to comprehend in part the hunter's intention.

He aided him eagerly to lay the rockets in the hollow of the wood, itself supported firmly between the stones, the mouth directed with all the care he would have given a shot on which life depended at the powder-canisters.

It is true that several horses and men came between the mark and the two projectiles, but their iron heads would make light of such obstacles, perhaps.

Enthusiastic at the great result of the first discharge, many of the Yaguis swarmed up the slope to see the second discharge more closely, and, spite of orders from the guard of the robber captain, they clustered so as to almost impede the smiling cannoneer in his second essay.

Three of the Apaches on their horses on one side, and half-a-dozen Mexicans, charged them slowly to bear them back. An opening was made thereby, a vista from the two watchers, even to the cannon and its ammunition pile.

"It is the time! touch off!" whispered Oliver.

The Englishman gave him a fusee out of his cigar-lights box, and kindled one himself simultaneously. The two, with one and the same movement, clapped them to the rocket matches, which they had pinched off short, and blew at the flames to accelerate the burning.

Engrossed in the application of the fire to the cannon, none of the enemy heard this slight crepitation, or saw the thin sparks on the barranca's crest.

Almost immediately the match was blazing within each case, and, covering the two whites with a shower of sparks, the rockets, slowly at first, but soon far

distancing the initial velocity, traversed the intervening space, and deflecting towards the ground, rushed noisily through the little group of robbers, Apaches, Yaguis and leaders, into the very heap of powder. The explosion occurred, but, not in the least pausing, the rockets continued an erratic flight, ploughing up the ground, ricochetting, separating, crossing and joining, diffusing silver and ruddy golden fire-balls, and thus careering among the amazed multitude till the cases fell as blackened coals.

Meanwhile, the powder which was loose had flared up and frightened the horses; then the open tins burst and showered the ground with flaring rain. The full tins went off like bombs, and one of them, dislocating the arrangement of timber under the gun, upset the whole pile. The cannon, of which the match had been uninterruptedly burning, went off whilst thus overturned, and the stone ball, perforating a herd of the Yaguis, split in three pieces, which fell upon the upturned, curious faces of their fellows beneath the hill.

"I'm inclined to b'lieve," remarked Oliver, drawing his revolver, "that the folks on the farm hev' seen our rockets go off at last."

Whilst the smoke was enshrouding the hill top, and the ground still quaking, the mounted men who had not been unsaddled, using both hands to restrain their terrified steeds, and the unhurt savages flying to and fro and against one another in great consternation, the rockets had been truly taken for their signal of action by both the Mexican parties, however far divided.

Out of the wood debouched the mounted Mexicans, shaking their banneretted lances as if they were reeds, and shouting "Mexico for ever!" As they came on, well thinned out, their swiftness gave them the appearance of a much more numerous column.

"The soldiers! the soldiers from Ures!" screamed the Yaguis in the hollow. "Look out for yourselves! the lancers are coming!"

On seeing them in confusion, and shrinking back from all sides so as to form a serried mass under the walls of the hacienda, Don Benito and Don Jorge, each at the head of a troop, dashed out of the corral at the main portal and the secret one, and executed a dreadful double charge to the cry of "Down with the rebels!"

The shock of the pretended lancers and the haciendero's followers on opposite sides of the insurgents' agitated ranks, occasioned a combat; but when the horsemen, with spear or cutlass, were intermingled with the footmen, it became slaughter. Neither side craved for mercy, and they fought as only men can fight who were either masters who feared to lose the upper hand of subjects, or slaves who were seeking reprisals for wrongs inflicted on anterior generations.

Whenever the swaying of the mob brought a mass near the hacienda or its stockade, all the defenders within, to whom were added the women, armed with obsolete firearms, musketry, and blunderbusses, fired upon them, and added not inconsiderably to the dismay and butchery.

In the interval, on the summit of the hill, where the smoke still lingered from the explosions, the salteadors had sought to punish the rocket dischargers, whom they had perceived in the rocks and under the pine stumps. It is true that the Englishman had most imprudently stood up in order to see what really was the extent of the damage done. The Apaches, at a word from Iron Shirt, had descended the hill towards the hacienda, rallying their own comrades preparatory to a prudent drawing off with all the live stock which might be added to their previously collected droves. They considered the battle lost to them on seeing the immovable Yaguis struck with panic, an emotion which extended with marvellous rapidity even to those on the other side of the farm, entirely unaffected by actual danger.

Stunned by the cannon report, a noise too great of its kind to have ever come within their experience, the banditti's horses were found to be unmanageable, and

they had alighted, all but their maimed leader, whose steed was less incapable of guidance, to punish the authors of the disaster which had turned the tide.

Three times they made a rush at the natural bulwarks in full belief that they could hurl the paltry opposition over, a-down the ravine; but each time their retreat was marked by a line of corpses. So near a mark was fatal to the heavy thirty-eight calibre repeaters.

"This is the second time you are running agen this snag," taunted the hunter, with that bitter loquacity common to him and Indians in the fever of combat, "but come on agen! Bless you, that's on'y an appetiser to the pie to foller! thar's roast ribs the next dish! Come and sweep the platter—only two tender chickens left, and plenty of gravy! Do come now, while the offer is open! Di I any gentleman say, 'Mercy!' well, I'm not sparing white skunks to-day! P'raps you're only drawing our fire—loafing round tell we haven't a cartridge left! Yes, do walk up for a grapple and a hug—we are only the worst kickers you ever seen, that's all."

All this sarcasm was echoed by Pedrillo; his fury was indescribable, to say nothing of the effects of the native brandy which had been given him as a remedy after his prostration under the fear of death. When he recognised the Englishman, all the pent-up rage of fifteen years inspired him, and his *absent leg* ached again as lively as when it had been torn off by the shark. The *gringo*, who had sunk his ship, after having run away with his bride and his cruiser; who had taken the treasure which the law of robbers assigned to the captain in good part; this impudent spoil-sport again had marred the consummation of vengeance upon his fellow-foe, Don Benito. He cast all prudence aside; he himself advanced with his surviving men prominently.

"We'll bury them in the dry *arroyo!*" he yelled, foaming at the mouth, and his wooden leg beating the horse's shoulder in his feverish convulsions. "Down with them."

What was their surprise to see the two men leap disdainfully over their breastwork, and stride towards the eight or ten Mexicans with revolver and knife in hand, spurning the dead and wounded due to the same well-plied weapons.

The bandits slackened their pace, but the mounted leader, still continuing, advanced beyond them. They resumed their charge. But already that separation had resolved Gladsden. Forgetting that he had been enjoined to keep side by side with the American as long as they faced the Rustlers, and, when the chance-medley came, to stand back to back with him, he sprang quickly onward. The now frightened Pedrillo aimed at him a terrible sweeping blow of a long sword, such another as the hapless *guitarero* had employed in the tavern. And, though Gladsden parried it partially with his knife, the glancing blade cleft his left shoulder. Stung by the pain, the Englishman dropped the knife out of the hand, already benumbed by the cut, and seizing the protruding wooden-leg of the luckless Terror of the Border, applied himself with such extraordinary vigour to tearing the wretch out of the saddle, that leg, man or saddle, was bound to come. It was the leg gave way at its straps, while Pedrillo was howling with agony and clinging to the saddle-bow, leaning with all his might contrariwise to the tug. On the unexpected release, the captain fell heavily over the horse and lay senseless on the ground, which he had reached head first. Gladsden caught the flying reins, and bounded upon the steed; as it flew forward in fright, two of the salteadors were shouldered aside, and the captain trodden upon by the hinder hoof; but he made no move, never so much as groaned, he had died as much from fright as anguish. This magnificent feat of *arms*, if the seizure of the nether limb could be so denominated, completely demoralised the robbers.

But some of the most courageous Yaguis, and an Apache who had lost a kinsman in the explosion as well as a war pony, which he more or less greatly prized, saw the white men victorious and the Rustlers about to fly, with a deeper chagrin and

enmity. They collected, by a common impulse, and hemmed in the pair. At their first shot, Gladsden was unhorsed, the animal falling dead under him; had it no reared at the smart of an arrow, the succeeding missiles, which entered its breast, must have riddled the rider. He and the American once more stood together with only that warm carcase as their buckler to some thirty foes.

Neither hugged any delusion as to the future. It was materially impossible that with their cartridges all spent, they could successfully resist so many inveterate foes, who, too, would, at any moment, be reinforced without stint from the Yaguis on the hill.

Indeed, thereupon commenced, with the rush of the Indians, one of those unequal contests which are common on the border, and which, when a worthy poet shall arise, will show posterity at what a waste of gallant hearts civilisation has executed its conquests.

Mute, sombre, back to back so closely that the penetrating lance would have spitted the pair, never recoiling so much as a hand's breadth, plying the hunting-knife for the one, and the sword of Pedrillo in his victor's grasp for the other, the unflinching couple, like a Janus animated, held out against the ever-onsetting foe.

Any other enemies must have been impressed with admiration.

Their bared arms were hacked and slit; the left of Gladsden hung disabled; but, on that side, Oliver's formidable right hand was performing miracles of valour and dexterity enough for both. They streamed with blood, which matted their locks and soaked their clothes, dangling in tatters through which their fair skin momently gleamed in glaring contrast with that of their dusky foes until dyed ruddy like the rest.

"How goes it, pard.?" queried Oliver, in a kind of lull in the rain of cuts, and blows, and thrusts which nothing but the very frenzy of the Indians, each to deal the stroke, prevented being fatal a hundred times. "I'm gitting my second wind myself and can go on carving till morning!"

There was no response to the jest; but the Oregonian felt the firm body that had been ever so long a rock of support, slowly weighing upon him. Then, alarmed for the very first time, or rather instantly inspired with sympathy and wild indignation at the injustice of so brave a man succumbing under the blows of such ignoble creatures, he lifted his voice as an appeal to the rectifier of such abuses, in his restricted mind:

"Cuss ye, for a heap of dirty niggers!" he vociferated. "Six at a time we'd have butchered you up harnsum! Whoop-ho! will no one of the colour of a white man let us have ten minutes to recruit; when we'll thrash them all agen, honest Injin!"

A deep, hoarse laugh at the speech, not at all understood, was the reply.

But a cry of terror was elsewhere audible.

"Something's coming, my *cahooter* (partner)," said Oliver, redoubling his gigantic sweeps of the buffalo-butchering knife. "And never more was a friend welcome! Don't you lose your grip yet!"

Indeed, without being able to discern the features of the knot of combatants on the hill, under the blue canopy of floating smoke, all silent since the two whites had exhausted their ammunition, and the close ring of their assailants forbade their employing firearms, Don Benito and his son, with a score of best riders, had taken the cow-path and somehow climbed the incline. Coming upon the crest at a little distance from the barranca, they formed column, four abreast, and raced to the spot of the hand-to-hand struggle.

"Viva Mexico!" was their continuous war-cry, with the ancient "Rally around Spain!"

"Oh, *viva* anything in the way of a 'Co,'" muttered Oliver, receiving his spent and insensible friend on his arm, and depositing it behind the horse's body at his feet. "You're like the sogers, you've come when the Injins took the scalps."

Happily the attackers turned at this fresh incident.

Opening out so as to allow the hind ranks to rush forward and form a line with the rest, the cavalry fell upon the Indians, and sabred them in the first dash past. As soon as they could wheel, which was done on the edge of the barranca by sharp reining in and spinning round whilst the horse's forehoofs were in air, they returned at full speed. But, already, the Yaguis had renounced their wish to finish with the two whites and fled, flinging away their weapons not to encumber their flight.

Alone, wounded, but stubborn, the Apache kneeling, took aim with his envenomed hatchet at the head of Oregon Oliver, intending to cast it ere he should be trampled under the Mexicans. The hunter could do nothing, his brain swam, his eyes closed with their last vision comprising the exultant visage of the malicious red man; his knife slipped out of his gore-smeared and stiffening hand; he reeled, and then, like a giant pine uprooted by a "norther," fell upon the body of his comrade as if to be his shield to the very last. There was just a moan, like a puma's that had defended its cub to the death.

At the same instant, the tomahawk whizzed forward and would have infallibly fleshed itself in him ere he finally rested; but Benito had buried his spurs in his steed, which took a prodigious leap. The hatchet gashed the Mexican's leg, even as he stooped forward and drove his reeking blade to the cross-hilt in the bosom of the redskin.

Don Jorge dismounted, and hastened to lift up the two white men, one after the other, and force some brandy down their throats. Meanwhile two of their friends had ridden after his father, who was seen to have lost control of his steed.

A silence fell on the hill, broken only by moans of the wounded and calls for water.

All at once there rose a loud cheering at the farmhouse; on its roof the ladies had collected and were waving scarves and veils. And, as an explanation, there was shortly wafted over the valley the music of a cavalry band, strong in brass and kettledrum, playing a lively *Arragonese jota*. The gay notes grated on the nerves of the Mexicans on the hill, collected round the sad group of the two whites and Don Benito, whom they had assisted off his horse.

"The dragoons from the town," observed one of the party. "That crowns the day. In an hour there will not be one Yagui within view of a telescope."

In fact, the valley was already strewn with plunder, and the dead and the wounded not capable of flight, but of living Indians hardly a hundred. The revolt was over. Then the field was again animated after this transient desertion, for Father Serafino, with peons carrying hand-barrows, came forth to attend to the wounded. Upon improvised litters of lances, the European, Oliver, and Benito, all mute and quiet for want of strength, were tenderly transported down the hill and up into the hacienda hall.

The little hero of the Angelito was displaced from his throne, the decorations removed, and the room became a hospital. The ladies had assumed a simple dress befitting their suddenly imposed duty, and were obeying the orders of the father, who had a knowledge of surgery, like all missionaries.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE TRUE CABALLERO.

Four days after the defeat of the insurgents, in his own bedroom of the Hacienda of the Monte-Tesoro, Don Benito Vasquez de Bustamente lay extended on the couch pale and weak. His dulled eyes were half shut, and only at long intervals did they let gleams of consciousness escape. Near him were kneeling his daughter and his wife; their daughter-in-law being too ill from her loss and the emotion of the conflict in which all dear to her were involved, to participate in this additional scene of sorrow.

Sad and silent, Don Jorge, Oliver, and the English gentleman, the latter's arm in a sling, and both the paler from profuse blood-letting, stood by the bedside. At an altar reared in the room, Father Serafino was just finishing prayers, to which the servants of the estate, kneeling in the corridors, had fervently responded.

At length the prostrate Don seemed to revive, for his cheeks were tinged with fugitive purple, and his opening eyes were clear.

"Weeping? Why do you weep?" he asked of his wife, who was sobbing, her head muffled in her black lace *rebozo*. "If my life has not been long, it comprises more years of unalloyed bliss than most men enjoy. This day, the Giver of all those boons calleth me unto Him. His will be done! Have I not been permitted to struggle against the poison which, twice menacing my life, only this time overcomes me, so slowly that my affairs are in order, I can thank those who contributed to the victory which has saved Sonora from a deluge of blood and fire, and I can bid you all farewell until we shall meet anew, never to part again, in the ever-during felicity above. Yea, truly," went on Don Benito, with increased fervour, "heaven has been kinder and more merciful than I merited, since not only has it preserved all those who lie closest on my bosom, but my final farewells can be made them with a clear voice, and my latest hour is cheered with the presence of the friend so cherished of my early years. He came in time to save my darling—and, with his valorous companion, to save us all. Embrace me, my friend," he continued, to Gladsden, as he extended his arms with an effort, "to thee I owe all those long, long happy days which have been mine on this oft-dolorous earth."

Gladsden ran his sound arm round him, and held him up against his bosom for a moment. Both of them had tears in their eyes. Then he lowered him gently back upon the pillow. For upwards of an hour still he spoke with them, encouraging, consoling, and preparing them as much as possible for the painful separation. Suddenly he sat up, with his eyes loftily directed, and in a clear voice they heard him call out—

"Lord God of my fathers, as I have borne myself like them, as a Christian gentleman of the pure strain, receive my soul!" and fell, like a log, dead.

All were kneeling now, and many a sob broke forth, with echoes, along the corridor, out to the very patio where the faithful peons mourned.

Two days afterwards, the American hunter, repulsing any reward but a watch from Donna Perla, a silver-mounted revolver from her brother, and an Indian scarf, enriched with pearls, inwrought by Donna Dolores, the donor, for display on holidays, or "for a sweetheart" (at which he smiled), started, jauntily as ever, on the best horse on the farm of Treasure Hill to return to the American army posts.

"Not a mossle of fear," he replied to Gladsden at his stirrups to the last moment, "did you not hear that Apache, whom Don Benito slashed, call me 'Comes-Whooping-with-Fire'—a good enough Injin name to keep this big chief clear of bruises till the next fall buffalo-surround. You'll hev' a letter from me in the Frisco Post-office by the time you git round to Californy."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE BEST BAIT TO CATCH APACHES.

THE farewell to the American was still "warm," when Don Jorge, spite of his grief, begged Mr. Gladsden to await his return, as he felt bound to "go up the country" to make sure the rebellion was over. He had spoken in such a matter-of-fact way that the Englishman shared with his wife and sister, and Don Benito's widow, much wonder at his absence being protracted. To have clearly known the reason, and to see him again, they would have been compelled to follow him to the very border of Sonora and Arizona.

The *Sierra de Pajarros*, a broken side piece of the Sierra Madre, may be said to divide on its double water-shed the feeders of the Yaqui River and the San Pedro, which courses north and west to supply the Gila. It has the most picturesque and striking aspect of any mountains in those regions, of old forests and cloud-capped peaks. Under the majestic bluffs, the ruins of ancient Spanish settlements crumble away, and the mysterious Pimas Indians prowl.

Nothing so rests the sight and rejoices the heart of wayworn adventurers, saddened and wearied by the sandy and salty plains, as these verdant heights. Almost ignored, and perhaps not mapped down in ordinary atlases, this Sierra preserves to this very day its primeval wildness; only very few "traces," formed more often by wild beasts than woodsmen, vaguely and widely apart appears in the brush. Very hard to penetrate, and then to move about in with certainty, none but Indians and hunters care to have anything to do with its mazes.

Nevertheless, not far from the Cascade of the Cave, a solitary hunter was tranquilly making a meal. It was Don Jorge. In Europe, things are different, for we are astonished at a soldier making a good meal before the battle, and a condemned criminal regaling on the eve of execution. Nevertheless, the care of the body is logical and conforms to natural laws. If joy or grief is allowed to cut the appetite short, the physique weakens, and the mind being counteracted upon, again deters the body, and illness, if not death, is the consequence of this deplorable folly. I prefer the hunter's habit.

Don Jorge finished his ration, and proceeded to smoke cigarettes, in a lounging attitude, which recreation he certainly deserved if only to remark the tired state of three excellent horses, which were picketed near him, and which, alternately shifted on and off from whilst in gallop (a fact not remarkable among Mexicans), had borne him almost without check to this remote spot.

No investigation of the desert which his eyrie commanded, had answered his expectations, and he was soon after his third cigarette deep in a slumber *pierna suella*, or with legs at ease, as his countrymen say.

There was not a breath in the air; the heat was overpowering, so that the birds were sleeping with heads under the wing, and the wild beasts could almost be heard panting and lolling out their tongues in their lairs.

Only one continuous sound disturbed the profound calm, and that was the noise of those infinitely little beings which never, anywhere, cease to accomplish their mysterious missions.

Two hours thus passed, with Don Jorge slumbering, his face hidden by his handkerchief and sombrero to keep off the sun and the gnats, of which myriads played catch-who-can with the sandflies.

All of a sudden the horses, which had stopped grazing and had been motionless with lowered heads, as if also taking a nap, shuddered all over, and abruptly tossed their manes and pointed their ears. With their fineness of hearing they

were aware of some suspicious sounds. One of them, whose lariat allowed the approach, stalked up to his master and uttered a soft and plaintive whinny, as if demanding help. However soundly a ranger sleeps, he must be able to wake up immediately and with all his senses clear, and the son of Don Benito did so at once. The next moment, turning over on his breast, too wary to rise on his feet, he had his rifle in hand, ready for action.

Listening and staring was of no avail. There was nothing far or near to justify the animals in their still evident fears.

It might be a jaguar or a grizzly only that they scented, if not a hostile man, but, in any case, Don Jorge took his safeguards. He hid his horses in the brush, and, crawling to the very brink of the bluff, scrutinised the plain, his finger on the rigger, his ears well opened.

But a quarter of an hour passed, whilst he remained as if moulded out of the clay and merely drying there.

But unexpectedly a tiny black spot under a shining speck which ever accompanied it, flashed on the view afar out of a straggling timberland. Soon the watcher could be sure it was a mounted man, his rifle gleaming, speeding towards him in the maddest haste. He had been clearing obstacles or bursting through them without any daintiness as to his garments, for they were torn by the thorns into tatters, and no doubt the swaying from side to side was as much weakness from loss of blood as the mere dodging to avoid a pursuer's missiles. No one else was perceptible to the young Mexican; but there must have been enemies in the woodland, running along parallel with the fugitive, for, turning without an anticipatory gesture, and stopping his horse with a terrible tug of the Mexican bit, he fired two shots into the cover, bent low, and rode on once more.

"'Tis a white man," observed Don Jorge, knitting his brow, "a hunter! Oh, my gracious saint!" he ejaculated, at the height of amazement and pain, "it is none other than Don Olivero! I thought he had taken the regular route for the Pass, whilst the Apaches, with our stock, struck off for this trail, and they have met him! I do no' need that plumed head to recognise he is the prey of the Apaches now."

He sprang up, regardless of being spied now, and quickly but comprehensively studied the scene.

Oregon Oliver's last two shots had galled the Indians into unusual daring. Three of them, on excellent horses, which the young hacendero might have known as his own, left the wood and sought to keep the hunter in the open, whilst gradually bearing down upon him. As they flanked him it was not easy for him to escape falling victim to one of the three when they saw fit to stop and fire or even risk a snap shot in mid-career.

The Mexican's rifle would not carry that distance. To mount and ride as far around as the steepness of the mountain sides compelled was equally as nugatory.

Instantly a new idea struck him, and he was carrying it out. Drawing his cutlass he severed the lariats of all three horses close to the picket pin, unfastened the other ends at the hobbled hoofs, and spliced the three into one long rope. Securing the last loop round a basalt column which a whale's rush would not have shaken, he flung the loose coils over the edge of the cliff, and, ere the end had fallen into the perpendicular, his machete between his teeth, the brave quickwitted youth was sliding down into the abyss.

There were some twenty feet to drop at the last thong, but he had remarked the crumbling sandstone to be a soft bed and he let go without a pause.

Meanwhile, the American swinging about like a drunken man, seemed in a despairing state. Either his ammunition was exhausted at last, or his only hope was to reserve his final cartridge for the hand-to-hand encounter, but a matter of moments.

The emboldened Apaches, at a signal from Iron Shirt, who formed the point of the angle of which they were the opening ends, and of which the hunted white marked the closing base's centre, began closing in.

But at the instant when they levelled their guns under their horses' necks, as they rode suspended on the off-side in precaution of the dreaded breechloader, the sudden appearance of the Mexican, like a spider on its thread, sliding down the face of the bluff, only remarked by the Apache chief, in whose direct front the feat was performed, gave the latter a start and he uttered an outcry despite himself. The two savages, surprised in turn, suspended their shots, and all three, as well as Oliver, none slackening their headlong pace, however, gazed at the man fallen from the clouds, and after striking the soft, dry ground with a force that sent up a cloud of sand, rebounding and dashing towards them, his bright steel waving overhead and his fresh young voice shouting:

"*Amigo!* friend, it is I who am here, praise to God!"

"Well, I'm durned!" roared the ranger.

But, not accustomed to let even so extreme a surprise alter any plan he had traced out, he only thought to profit by the brief but deep confusion of the enemies. With a nimbleness that perfectly revealed how assumed was his air of lassitude and despair, he sat up in the saddle and fired two shots, one to the right, one to the left, by a graceful turn of the hips which a queen of the ballet could not have surpassed, controlling his steed simply by the pressure of his knees.

Spite of the emergency, Don Jorge could not repress a cry of admiration.

One of the Apaches, his horse's throat cut by the same bullet that penetrated his head beyond, fell in a heap under the side of the animal, also thrown and floundering in the death agony. The other, perforated in the eye by the lead scattering along his own gun which had split the ball, emitted a horrid scream, as he was borne, still held by the horsehair loop which detained his foot to the crupper, and which is there placed to enable the rider to hang alongside the pony, back towards the thicket, where his brains would soon be knocked out by the masterless mustang.

Iron Shirt was dismayed. He lifted his horse in order to turn and seek the covert. But already the unerring marksman was covering him, and he held his horse rearing, afraid to fire his last load with two foes before him, and to expose himself in the riding away.

"Spare him!" cried Don Jorge, hoarsely, "murderer of my father, murderer of my little son, I—I, alone, must have his life!"

"Lucky you spoke," returned Oliver, firing.

The horse of the chief, struck in the shoulder, roared with pain, so intense was the anguish whilst being tortured with the bit, wrenched its head away and fell forward, ere rolling on one side.

The Apaches did not lose his command of sense at the disaster, for he leaped clear. But his shield, his lance, and his gun were flung from him, and before he could reach the latter. Don Jorge had made a series of prodigious bounds, like a tiger, and placed his foot on it. The baffled Indian sprang back as rapidly and seized his spear and shield.

But instantly, careless of ammunition, and fearful lest the lance, cast as a javelin, would transfix the Mexican only armed with a sword, the hunter fired again. The spear, split in half, was left a mere stump in the redskin's feverish, quivering grasp.

"That's the style to draw teeth, I judge," remarked the American, throwing himself off his horse, and approaching the pair.

His last weapon was a machete, and this Iron Shirt, protected by his round shield, drew as he advanced on Don Jorge.

"I thank you," said the latter. "Steel to steel! this is my heart's desire!"

"You are going to get a licking, chief," said Oliver, grimly, as he pulled out a corncob pipe, filled it and lit it with unshaking fingers.

"So thar ain't no 'casion to thank me for the promise which I give not to interfere. Fairplay's a jewel, and you kin wear in your ear all the jewel you'll win in this hyar tussle."

The Apache wasted no breath in a rejoinder. His lips were parted only for a smile, the set grin of a man who had no hope but to inflict all the pain he could on an antagonist before he met his inevitable death. He had on his mind not only the recent striking down of his aids, but the death of others in the past and on the Sonoran plains, due to the American who had shown himself to the Apache caravan only, it was now clear, to draw off a detachment. Like the redman his hatred was insatiable, even that slaughter in which he had distinguished himself seemed no way to wipe out the final collapse on the heap of slain. But for Don Benito, Oliver would have been "rubbed out!" The thought was intolerable, and, we see, all alone, he had devoted himself to harassing the Indians in their retreat, and lured away the chief. The scalp of so renowned a hunter would have been a more magnificent trophy than the herd of cattle, to show in the Apache town when the old fathers should demand their lost sons.

Meanwhile, the two men were facing one another, broadsword in hand.

For his age Jorge was endowed with unwonted powers, but his frame had not fully set, and he had an antagonist whose vigour surpassed the common, too. Nevertheless, the Mexican was not dismayed, and the hunter took care not to betray any apprehension he felt as to the result of the terrible duel. If Jorge smiled, it was because he relied on his skill and agility. On the farm he had joined in all the wrestling and knife play of the Vaqueroes, and Old Silvano had passed him as a pupil to whom there was nothing more he could teach. Therefore, the youth, gifted with lofty courage and unalterable coolness, believed himself capable of struggling with advantage.

As a kind of chivalrous signal, the Indian slapped his shield resonantly.

They mutually advanced till their forward feet almost touched. For a moment their blades clashed and then the redman, shouting with savage joy, delivered a terrific cut. But the air alone was severed, the agile Mexican having shifted his position with great celerity. Their first encounter was merely a test of one another's style, on which would be founded the passage of arms itself. They fell to it anew, but this time also, Don Jorge showed incredible quickness; he eluded the blows, parried them or fenced them off with all that dexterity which a Mexican should exhibit in the management of a weapon which is to him what the *navaja* is to the Spanish peasant. With giddy rapidity he spun round the savage; and when he got a cut in, as the phraseology of such sport has it, it was a telling one. The shield, however tough the buffalo hide, could not long resist such hearty strokes; sliced off into tissue thinness, cleft, gaping wider and wider with its own tension, Iron Shirt suddenly cast it at the young man to bewilder him and at the same time darted forward. But the Mexican, who uses his blanket sometimes in just the same way as a blind, is taught to keep his eyes on his opponent's, and the ferocious gleam in the Apache's had warned him; he received the charge firmly; parried the cut with excellent precision, though the rush brought the two heaving breasts in contact, and as the Indian receded, lest he should be grappled, he struck in turn. The blow, from the handle turning in the grasp a little paralysed by the late ward, came flat on the savage's shoulder and, diverted upwards, removed his ear as clean as if done by a surgeon. Iron Shirt yelled with fury.

"You will never more hear an infant wail, pierced by your coward arrows!" hissed Don Jorge, leaning forward. "Come again, and I will sunder the other!"

More hideously than before this third meeting ensued. No longer so much on the defensive and aggressive, but bent on leaving his mark, the Mexican gave two cuts for the other's each one. All of them left a bleeding trace. One would have concluded that he meant to hack the redskin's surface into a chessboard. The slashed face of the Apache had lost human semblance; the gashes already were swollen, and his eyes were sealing with blood; he groaned with tantalised rage, however, more than pain, whilst the Mexican, anticipating his victory ever since he had made mincemeat of the buckler, redoubled his hail of steel. Now it was the Apache chief who only stood on guard.

"There!" cried Don Jorge, taking his cutlass in both hands, and pressing forward so that their knees knocked, "that is to avenge my father!"

On receiving this irresistible chopping blow, which beat down his jagged edged blade, Iron Shirt lifted up a yell of spite and despair. The steel cleft through all, top knot, frontal bone and brow, and, opening his arms, he reeled, half turning, and fell without a stir on the blood-besprinkled sands, the machete left in the wound, so inextricably had it been driven there.

Oliver approached, and at the same time bending over the stiffening body and patting the panting conqueror on the shoulder, he said:

"Ef them doggoned 'Paches was to have seen this fight they would not cross into Mexico for a year, I reckon. You've fout him squar' and fa'r, a riggler stand-up fight, and you're a credit to the father, whose wiping out don't count one for them red niggers now, nohow."

They sat down there to rest, and Oliver related his adventure.

"Ef I on'y had had an idee that the old man's loss preyed upon you in that sor o' way we mout ha' got up some pootier trick o' war! but you've sarved him A-one and you are entitled to his scalp to hang over your fire-place."

Rejecting this trophy, and only despoiling the Indian chief of his weapons, and adding to the prize those of the other Apaches, whose hair the hunter had no scruples to remove, they climbed the mountain to the horses which came at the haciendero's calls. After spending some hours together in conversation, which they promised to renew, "who knows when?" as the Spaniards say—they parted, Oliver resuming his route.

When Don Jorge returned home, his revenge sated, he found the English gentleman, who then broke away with a great effort from the entreaties of the rich widow and her family. He felt the need of loneliness on the ocean to take the edge off his acute sorrow. But the memory, thus mournfully renewed, of his youthful friendship, so fatally cut short, dwells piously cherished in "the heart of heart," and there will flourish till he, too, reposes his adventurous body in the grave.

However, as an author may anticipate as well as record, we may be allowed to suggest that there is nothing contrary to logic in the hope that, if ever Donna Perla and her mother act on Mr. Gladsden's urgent invitation, often renewed by letter, for them to visit him in England, the Gladsden juniors will have to draw lots for the Mexican heiress. Sure is it that they will find nowhere a happier choice, be it for wealth, beauty, or rare goodness, than in this true "Treasure of Pearls."

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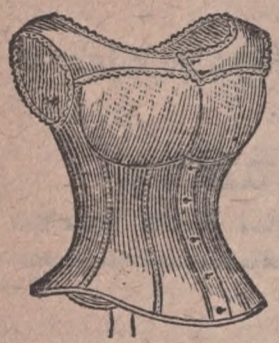

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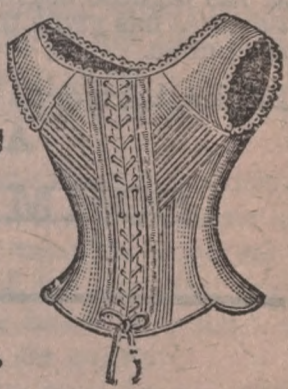

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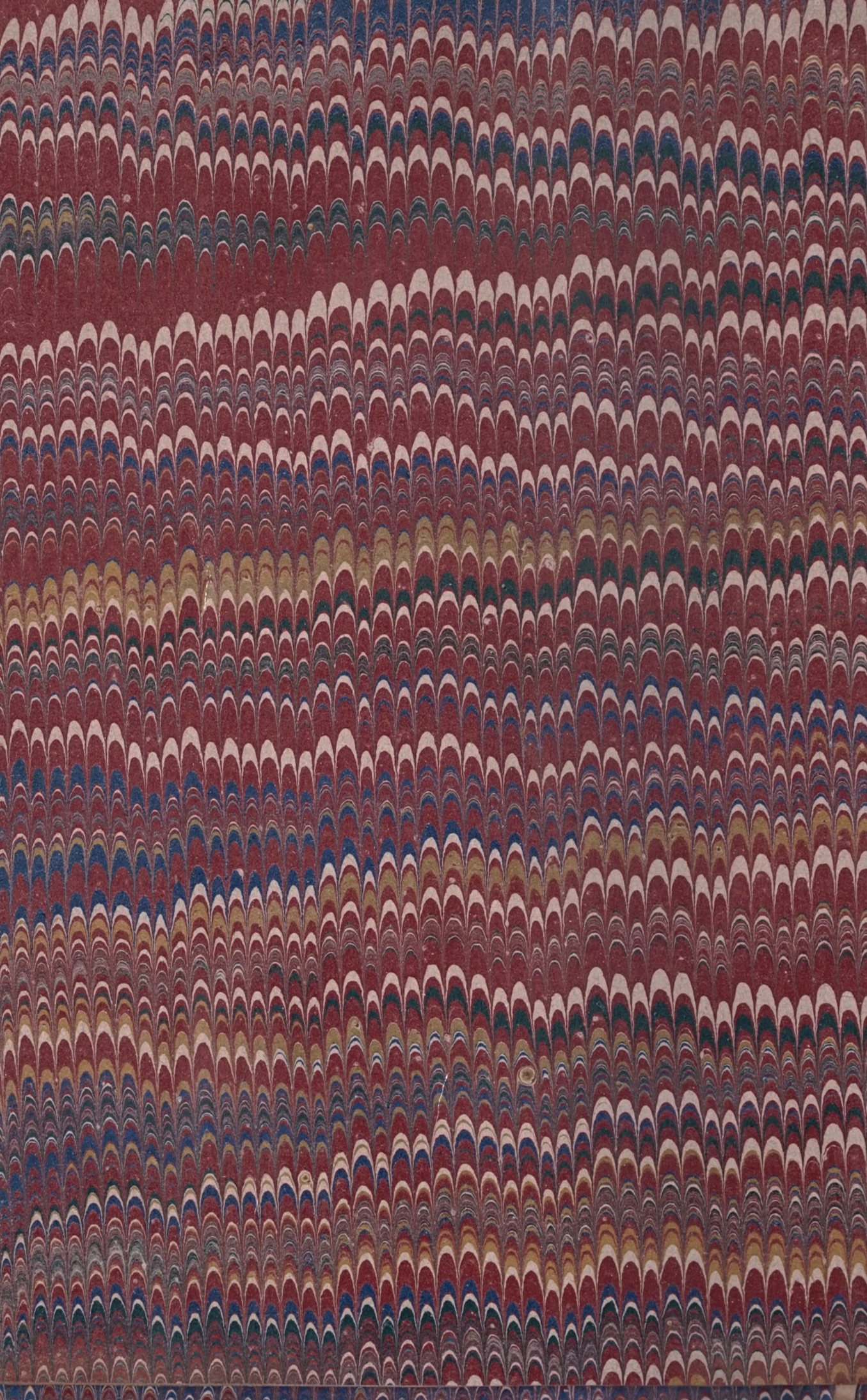

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